Elder Israel Dammon's Wild Maine Show of February 1845

A Critique of a Regrettably Long Delayed Official Response

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PREFACE

On 26 Aug 2009, Frederick ("Fred") Hoyt sent me a letter accompanied by his paper, "ELDER ISRAEL DAMMON'S WILD MAINE SHOW OF FEBRUARY 1845: A CRITIQUE OF A REGRETTABLY LONG DELAYED OFFICIAL RESPONSE." He solicited my "reactions" to the paper and asked for my help. This was one of many of such papers that Fred shared with me for discussion and comments.

It was clear both from his letter and the first page of the paper that Fred was responding to a publication, presumably five years earlier, by James R. Nix, "Another Look at Israel Damman [*sic*]," found on the Ellen G. White Estate website. As Hoyt notes in the paper, the site described this publication as "A talk given during the Ellen G. White Summit held at Avondale College, Cooranbong, N.S.W., Australia, February 2-5, 2004." No doubt Nix edited the published form of this piece sometime after delivering the talks, at least by adding the 126 endnotes.

Fred Hoyt, PhD (Claremont), a professor of history and political science on the La Sierra campus of Loma Linda University at the time, routinely spent summers with his wife in Northern New England searching for evidence of early Adventist presence and activities in the area in general and of Ellen Harmon (later White) in particular. In the process, he accidentally found a microfilm report of the trial of the Millerite preacher, Israel Dammon, in a local newspaper, the *Piscataquis Farmer.* He was so troubled to learn that James White and 17-year old Ellen Harmon, future founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, were said to be participants in a clearly wild, fanatical religious event in a local farmhouse that he could not immediately continue reading the account. What he encountered was significantly different from later Adventist reports of the event, especially those of Ellen White. This led Hoyt to bury the report for about four years until 1987, when he published the account in *Spectrum* and discussed it therein with three historian colleagues.

Meanwhile, Bruce Weaver, another researcher, independently found this report of the Dammon trial and published it along with extensive analysis in *Adventist Currents* (1988). Although Hoyt acknowledged Weaver's discovery and publication and commended his analysis, Nix, who numerously cited Hoyt, never mentioned or cited Weaver.

Hoyt's paper seems to be especially identified with the year 2009. Before he sent it to me near the end of August, Fred had already shared it that year with at least two other people and made a public presentation of it. The latter was at an Adventist Forum meeting at Pacific Union College in early March and possibly also in June.

What follows is Fred's paper as he sent it to me in 2009. My edits have been few. While preserving his title page, wording, footnotes, most punctuation, line spacing, page formatting and numbering, I replaced his inadvertent double spaces between some words with single spaces and added missing periods to some sentences. I left in place his occasional subject-verb disagreements and his lack of commas after opening adverbs and adverbial phrases.

I publish this paper by Fred Hoyt not only because it is likely his last written work on the subject but also because it addresses Nix's concerns and anticipates some concerns of later scholars.

I am pleased to acknowledge inspiration, encouragement, and assistance from many friends and colleagues concerning this project, including Bill Shull, Andrew Howe, Nancy Lacourt, Greg Schneider, Douglas Hackleman, Larry Geraty, Ronald Graybill, and Jonathan Butler. Above all, I posthumously thank Fred Hoyt for writing this paper and sharing it with me. May this project contribute to the availability and usefulness of his work.

Warren C. Trenchard
12 Dec 2024

ELDER ISRAEL DAMMON'S WILD MAINE SHOW OF FEBRUARY 1845

A CRITIQUE OF A REGRETTABLY LONG DELAYED OFFICIAL RESPONSE

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ELDER ISRAEL DAMMON'S WILD MAINE SHOW OF FEBRUARY 1845

A CRITIQUE OF A REGRETTABLY LONG DELAYED OFFICIAL RESPONSE

Recently I noticed an impressive document titled "ANOTHER LOOK AT ISRAEL DAMMON" on the White Estate web site. That flamboyant Millerite elder and I had indeed previously met under bizarre circumstances in an obscure Maine weekly newspaper strikingly titled the *Piscataquis Farmer.* His pious eccentricities and vulgarities had never completely fled from my consciousness.

James R. Nix is the author of this 29-page paper without title, office, or academic qualifications given. It is described as "A talk during the Ellen G. White Summit [sic] held at Avondale College, Cooranbong, N.S.W., Australia, February 2-5, 2004."

I was neither aware of this "summit" meeting "down under," nor was I invited to attend and participate, although I had found this critically important document more than twenty years before and had carefully edited it for *Spectrum,* August 1987. Neither was I provided a copy prior to its presentation for possible reactions and comments. With due respect for the daunting challenges it still presents, I am convinced that I could have answered at least tentatively most of Nix's questions from materials in my personal research files had I only been contacted.

This is all really quite inexplicable. Waiting so long to respond to such an important document in our early history does seem unconscionable—if not also patently irresponsible. All I can now do is attempt responses to the best of my ability and within the limits of my own research in Maine and other archives and libraries.

GENERAL MATTERS

First, some general comments and questions. The surname for the principal actor in this melodrama is consistently spelled "DAMMON" in this significant document. Nix should therefore have justified his regular use of "DAMMAN," a spelling which never occurs in the document, although some easily recognizable abbreviations do occur, such as "D.," "Elder D," and "br. D." To be statistically "scientific," he was called simply "Dammon" 36 times; "Elder Dammon" 18 times; "Brother Dammon" 12 times; "Israel Dammon" 2 times; and once each "I. Dammon," and "Mr. Dammon." Never in the record was he referred to as "DAMMAN."

Other sources could be cited for further confirmation. Thus the *New-York Observer* on 22 March 1845 ("From the Portland Daily Advertiser"—undated) referred to him as Israel Dammon, Elder Dammon, and just Dammon. (This was a short article because they had "some hesitation in publishing the abominable facts below," including items about Ellen Harmon, James White, Dorinda Baker, and Simeon Hall.)

Then in a large heavily bound volume at the Maine State Archives in Augusta labeled "District Court Record, Piscataquis County, Vol. 2," on pages 312 and 313 in which this trial is formally summarized, his name appears as Israel Dammon or just Dammon. It should also be firmly stated here that there is absolutely no difference—not even on a minor point—between this summary and the account given by the anonymous Reporter in the *Piscataquis Farmer*.

Therefore, James Nix is obligated to supply sound reasons for consistently using "Damman." The unexplained and unauthorized change offers serious possibilities of further confusion if it is not corrected.

Next the precise nature of this key document must be fully delineated. It is a newspaper account headed "TRIAL OF ELDER DAMMON, REPORTED FOR THE PISCATAQUIS FARMER." This newspaper, a weekly, was identified as the "PISCATQAQUIS FARMER; DEVOTED TO POLITICS, AGRICULTURE, LITERATURE, MORALS, TEMPERANCE, NEWS, ETC., ETC., Dover, Maine, Friday Morning, 7 March 1845, 1 & 2." It also proudly declared itself to be " Neutral in Politics and Religion."

Anticipating unusual demand for their next issue, the editor placed this notice in the 28 February 1845 issue, headed "COME-OUTERS—or MILLERITES:

> We propose publishing a report of the trial of Elder Damon [sic], the Millerite, as taken by a townsman of ours. Should any one want extra numbers of the Farmer, they will please make it known to us on or before Monday morning next—as it will probably be ready for press to appear in next week's paper.

This trial at Dover, Maine, on Monday and Tuesday, February 17 and 18, 1845, concerned activities led by Elder Israel Dammon in Atkinson, Piscataquis County, Maine. It was tried before Moses Swett, Esquire, of Foxcroft in association with Seth Lee, Esquire, and H.G.Q. Morison, Esquire (all probably Justices of the Peace), representing the State of Maine in prosecuting. James Stuart Holmes, a local attorney, represented Israel Dammon. Joel Doore (a 65-year-old resident of Atkinson)[1] claimed in testimony, "I did engage counsel in this case to defend the prisoner." No fee was mentioned so it may have been *pro bono* work by Holmes.

[1] For identification of participants beyond the *Piscataquis Farmer*'s data I am indebted to the fine research in the 1850 U.S. Census records by Bruce Weaver the author of "Incident in Atkinson: The Arrest and Trial of Israel Dammon," *Adventist Currents*, April 1988. Participants will be as fully identified as possible on their first appearance.

Justice Chandler directed this key question at witness Ebenezer Blethen (40; Atkinson farmer): "Who was the presiding elder at the meeting?" His answer: "Elder Dammon presided and took the lead of the meetings that I attended." Chandler and Morison, prosecuting for Maine, therefore formally announced these objectives for the ensuing trail: "The meetings appear to be elder Dammon's meetings—he took the lead and guided them, and is accountable for any public misconduct, and ought to check it: we propose to show the character of his meetings, to show the character of the man."

A formal complaint had been directed "to Charles P. Chandler, Esq., one of the Justices of the Peace within and for the County of Piscataquis," from "HARTFORD J. ROWE, of Dover [a 33-year-old farmer], in the Co. of Piscataquis, Yeoman, upon his oath [complaining]

> That Israel Dammon, Commorant of Atkinson, in said County, Idler, is, and for several days last past, has been a vagabond and idle person, going about in the town of Atkinson, aforesaid, in the county aforesaid, from place to place, begging—that he the said Israel Dammon is a common railer or brawler, neglecting his calling, or employment, misspending his earnings, and does not provide for the support of himself family [sic], & against the peace of the State of Maine, and contrary to form of Statute in such cases made and provided.

Rowe therefore prayed "that the said I. Dammon, may be apprehended and held to answer to said complaint and dealt with relative to the same as law and justice may require." Thus with these needful legal procedures having been implemented and Israel Dammon a prisoner of the Court in the name of the state of Maine, justice could be pursued following the magnificent traditions of Anglo-American jurisprudence. Yet a strange anomaly appears here. After initiating this essential action, Hartford J. Rowe of Dover never appeared among the 38 witnesses who testified at the ensuing trial.

THE REPORTER

Unfortunately the reluctant author of the newspaper "copy" of the trial for unexplained reasons chose to remain anonymous, signing himself simply "THE REPORTER." "When I volunteered to do it, I had no doubt but that the examination would have been gone through within the course of a few hours," he explained. "Judge then what must be my surprise on finding the Court House filled to overflowing and having it occupy such a length of time"—two full days. What this outstanding local citizen selected for his integrity was telling his readers was that he was surprised at the general interest and concern this incident stimulated, the actual attendance at the trial, and the complexity of the legal-social-political-religious and psychological issues raised.

"To the witnesses"—whom he would cite extensively—he declared that he had "abridged your testimony as much as possible, and have omitted much of the most unimportant part, in order to shorten the work, but have endeavored in no case to misrepresent you . . . ."

An obviously reluctant and extremely modest scribe described his work as "an imperfect and impartial [sic] report . . . [in] consequence of my total inexperience, being but a laboring man" who "should shrink from publishing it, but from the urgent solicitation of others." Graciously thanking "the Court for the favor of a seat by [near] them, and the Court and Counsel for the use of their minutes, I sign myself this once [sic] THE REPORTER."

This is an absolutely unacceptable, overly modest disclaimer. The careful quality of his work under obviously difficult circumstances, with no recording devices, indicates

that he was no ordinary laboring man. If he possessed no more than a rudimentary education, he had certainly diligently educated himself far beyond local norms.

Not yet finished with his preamble, and still clearly defensive about his ability to perform a task which he and many others considered vitally important for their community, he felt compelled to add an important formal nota bene: "I have preserved the language of the witnesses as much as possible."

NATURE OF THE DOCUMENT

Now, finally, on to his involved report—surely one of the most complex documents in the history of early 19th century Maine.

From extensive experience in reading Maine newspapers of this era, I am astonished that I ever encountered it. And especially that it was printed in such an obscure weekly 4-page newspaper. Such impressive detail, unusual care with facts, and recognition of an important event that could easily have been overlooked, would be surprising for even a prominent daily newspaper in cities such as Boston or Portland. (Weaver declares that this document has "overwhelming face-value credibility," which he supports with nine carefully worded conclusions.[2] I fully agree with his evaluation.)

Even more astonishing is the extensive descriptions of other characters in this melodrama who were not on trial and could therefore have been easily ignored, such as Ellen Harmon, Dorinda Baker, James White, and Simeon Hall. What reasonable explanation can be offered for such a seemingly inexplicable phenomenon?

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[2] "INCIDENT IN AKINSOSN: The Arrest and Trial of Israel Dammon," *Adventist Currents*, April 1988, p. 23. Hereafter this article will be cited as "Incident in Atkinson."

I believe that Ellen Harmon's startling words and actions, sometimes dramatic, at other times simply bizarre, at obscure Atkinson, Maine, that February 15th 1845 Saturday night resulted in the first printing of her name in a newspaper.

Her previous regular attendance and participation at Beethoven Hall meetings in Portland was clearly described in a detailed newspaper account. Although she was not specifically named by Quaker journalist M.F. Whittier her melodramatic and strident performances could well have been common knowledge in her home town. They also perfectly matched her own exultant accounts.

These long hidden materials force us to reconsider some previously accepted interpretations of our tumultuous beginnings. This includes the clearly decisive role of James White long before their marriage, her personal relationships while yet only a child with other Millerite "elders," and her numerous "visions" not previously listed concerning specific persons (later dubbed "testimonies") that she casually made public (which certainly raises serious questions concerning the total lack of a functioning social conscience). But such intriguing items must wait their turn as this challenging document itself must first be carefully analyzed.

We have unwittingly brought this unexpected confrontation with historical truth upon ourselves by allowing hagiographers and apologists—some admittedly extremely skilled at their crafts—to monopolize the relating of our truly remarkable "story" as a distinct people. Artistic "license" and psychological myopia in the name of Truth have inevitably led to unfortunate distortions, evasions, obfuscations, and just plain duplicitous behavior. Sadly lacking any concept of a loyal opposition and the essential benefits of the openness of scholarly methodologies, we have drifted onto dangerous rocks and

shoals while endlessly congratulating our collective selves on how remarkably good and clever and truth-filled we really are. Oh, Hubris, have mercy on us!

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BIG MEETING

A general overview of that momentous meeting at the home of James Ayer, Jr., (39; farmer), in Atkinson, Maine, in early frigid 1845—clearly on the outer limits of respectable society even for frontier Maine—provides an appropriate setting for our investigation.[3] Remember it was a normal trial in the great tradition of British-American jurisprudence, adversarial in structure, with two clearly differentiated sides, the State of Maine prosecuting the indicted, Elder Israel Dammon, and the accused defended by legal counsel, attorney James Stuart Holmes.

First, witnesses for the prosecution testified in summary form (always under binding oath or affirmation) concerning the general tenor, climate, character, or ambience of the physical setting for this convoluted backwoods human drama.[4] Note that all witnesses who testified were adult males. Many females were referred to but their testimonies would have suffered from severe disabilities in the sexist legal climate of that era. Ellen Harmon, of course, suffered under the double disability of being both female and legally still a child.

"By spells it was the most noisy assembly I ever attended," William C. Crosby (37; an attorney) testified, "—there was no order, or regularity, nor anything that

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[3] Ellen was at Atkinson as just part of her early 1845 eastern Mane trip to "fight fanaticism" of undesignated types. The fullest account of this pioneering crusade appeared in 1860 in *Spiritual Gifts: My Christian Experience, Views and Labors in Connection with the Rise and Progress of the Third Angel's Message* (Battle Creek, Michigan: James White), 38-42, in which Dammon's arrest at Atkinson received the bulk of her attention. Earlier visits were made to Orrington, where she met James White and the "desponding were encouraged"; Garland, where she felt as if "an angel of God was standing by my side to strengthen me"; and Exeter, where "some fanatical persons . . . were exalted by the spirit of Satan."

[4] Admittedly it is not always clear which witness was called by which side; that is, it is not always indicated whether a particular witness had been subpoenaed by the State or by the defense. Classifications when deemed useful will often have to be made solely on the contents of their testimonies.

resembled any other meeting I ever attended." "They would at times all be talking at once, halloing at the top of their voices . . . ." Joseph Moulton (47; farmer), sheriff for Piscataquis County, was succinct: "can't describe the place—it was one continued shout."

Joel Doore moderated the noise level somewhat—at least for Dammon: "He preaches louder than most people; no more noisy than common preachers of this faith [Adventist or Millerites]." "There was not one tenth part of the noise Saturday evening," Doore added, "that there generally is at the meetings I attend." Wow! What must the decibel rating have been at some Millerite meetings! William C. Crosby agreed: "I don't say Dammon shouted the loudest; I think some others stronger in the lungs than he." (Unfortunately we have no decibel readings for Ellen's favorite hometown meetings in Portland's Beethoven Hall but from M.F Whittier's description they were surely astonishingly high.[5])

Plyn Clark (54; Atkinson farmer) was devastating: "I think the whole character of the meeting was demoralizing." J.W.E. Harvey was also very pointed in his evaluation: "The meeting appeared very irreligious . . . ." Thomas Proctor slew with few words: "as to divine worship there was none." Ebenezer Blethen concurred: "It did not have the appearance of a religious meeting."

What more could fairly be said about that wild anarchic gathering held under the guise of religion with its distinctive pattern of compulsive disruptive behavior? A low level religious functionary mercifully closed this most distressing topic: Deacon James Rowe's (Dover resident since 1808) summary testimony at least had a striking literary

[5] *Portland Transcript*, 1 November 1845, 228-29.

flourish to its damning indictment: “I have been young, and now am old, and of all the places I ever was in, I never saw such a confusion, not even in a drunken frolic.”

I am transfixed with horror! What were you and Ellen doing there, James? You were an adult and an ordained minister of the Gospel. She was but a poorly educated female child. You must accept complete responsibility. Where was the adult female chaperone dictated by that Puritanical society? Why did you not speak out forcefully about those wild goings on all about you and Ellen? This detailed report indicates that you stood or sat there absolutely mute throughout all the hours of those barbaric proceedings that were simply suffused with blatant sexual overtones and innuendos parading under the transparent cover of religious ecstasy. Had you urged Ellen to travel about with you giving that vision knowing that its contents was simply that the Door of Mercy (Probation) was banging shut within a few hours and that baptism was the sole route to safety out of a doomed world? Why have we been led to believe that Ellen only repeated her mild first vision and that she was there to “fight fanaticism”? The overwhelming evidence declares that she uttered not a word on either topic.[6]

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[6] The traditional view of her fight against fanaticism has been very dramatically phrased by Elder Arthur W. Spalding, who of course was not there. “It remained for one, ‘the weakest of the weak,’ to go down into the arena and boldly slay the wild beasts,” Spalding declaimed. “Ellen Harmon was in the midst of the fight . . . denouncing fanaticism and building up the faith of the true believers.” (*Captains of the Host* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1959), 126-28.) A more recent work by her grandson, Elder Arthur L. White, quotes at length from an 1874 letter [note that it is almost 30 years after the events she recalled in such vivid detail]. “I was shown [i.e., she had a vision] I must go to the very places where fanaticism had done the most evil, and bear my messages of reproof,” she declared. She also “saw [again from a vision] that we would be in danger of imprisonment and abuse.” Yet most shocking were her dire words of evaluation regarding the disastrous impact of this plague of fanaticism (never defined by her) on the nascent Adventist church. What she termed “a fearful stain was brought upon the cause of God which would cleave to the name Adventist like leprosy. Satan triumphed, for this reproach would cause many precious souls to fear to have any connection with Adventists.” Those indeed are hard words; but they are also striking by her failure to admit any involvement for either herself or James in this pervasive sin. (Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years, 1827-1862* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1985), 69-72.)

A SHAKY SYSTEM OF BELIEF

Fearing we may have unwittingly shut the door of mercy rudely in the face of our progenitors by failing to understand those severely disappointed and deeply depressed followers of William Miller, we should attempt to reconstruct their system of belief from the extensive testimony given at this unique trial. It may be perfectly obvious, but it should again be pointed out to avoid any possible confusion, that all those who testified were adult male residents of Piscataquis County, Maine. Much as we may wish for Ellen Harmon to have been placed on the witness stand under severe oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, she was then legally a child and a female and consequently her testimony would have been doubly inadmissible. James, of course, was clearly qualified. So we can deeply regret that he was not subpoenaed. But he and Ellen quickly—and very wisely—departed before the trial began.

Two fundamental questions obviously spring from all the testimony: What did those followers of Elder Israel Dammon actually believe and teach? That is, what was their systematic theology? Second, what were the basic elements of their liturgy, their order of "divine" service?

APOCALYPTICISM

First, did they have any basic, fundamental religious beliefs that clearly took priority? Quite obviously they were all "Adventists" expecting almost momentarily the actual physical return of Christ. This was the core "Advent Doctrine"—the heart and soul of their lives, the essence of their beings, the catalyst that literally made everything else function minute by minute, the locus of their ethical, moral, and spiritual rationality.

Any differences among them consisted mainly of precisely when that cataclysmic event would occur.

A few examples will suffice. "I heard Dammon say 'God's a coming! God's a coming!!'" Ebenezer Trundy (41; Dover farmer) testified. "I believe the world will come to an end within two months—prisoner [Dammon] preaches so," George S. Woodbury (23; Dover millman) declared. "I believe this is the faith of the band." John Gallison (50-60; Dover) was even more impatient: "I expect the end of the world every day."

This Gothic drama soon revealed a weird apocalyptic third-rate preacher, *Elder* Israel Dammon, on trial for disturbing the peace. However, it was much more than just another offshoot from William Miller's 22 October 1844 "Great Disappointment" with new actors.

As testimony followed sworn or affirmed testimony the core of this Puritan morality play significantly shifted from petty disorderliness at remote provincial levels to cosmic apocalyptic developments—the imminent return to this doomed world of Christ the King and the final destruction of the wicked and all their wickedness. Perhaps Dammon thought he was in control of those ecstatic episodes when he shouted "God's a coming! God's a coming!!" But his macho psyche was mistaken. Terribly wrong.

He had definitely lost control of that apocalyptic drama—Oh! unthinkable disaster!—to *two Maine women*, specifically to one sickly adult woman of uncertain character from Orrington, and a frail female child barely seventeen from Portland who was illness-prone, unsure of herself, poorly educated, and from an undistinguished family of petty artisans. This theme, rather than Dammon's conduct, is overwhelmingly more

important for us today. Thus we should study it carefully for whatever enlightenment it may offer concerning our early history as a church.

UNORDAINED/UNFRANCHISED WOMEN MANDATE TOTAL IMMERSION

Although the chronological sequences in this trial account are not always clear, we shall allow the senior woman to open this ad hoc evangelistic crusade. Her initial confrontation with hardened sinners was inconclusive. "A woman that they called Miss [Dorinda] Baker, said the devil was here, and she wanted to see him—she selected me [Loton Lambert] and said you are the devil, and will go to hell. I told her she want [wasn't] my judge." James Ayer, Jr., "affirmed" that Dorinda told brother [Joel] Doore she was distressed on his account—was afraid he would lose his soul, and advised him to be baptised." Doore's response was not recorded. But Ayer explained that "We went to the water after eleven o'clock [at night]—brother Dammon baptized two."

The younger woman—actually still a child—was more successful in her personal evangelism. "The vision woman [Ellen Harmon from Portland] called Joel Doore [Loton Lambert testified], said he had doubted, and would not be baptized again—she said Br. Doore don't go to hell. Doore kneeled to her feet and prayed." But we are not told why he felt compelled to kneel at Ellen's feet, the nature of his prayer, or if he was baptized.

Isley Osborne (35; Atkinson) made Ellen's dramatic work very clear: "She told them their cases had been made known to her by the Lord and if they were not baptized [sic] that evening, they would go to hell." That settled it for Isley. "We believed her, and brother Dammon and I advised them to be baptized." "Imitation of Christ [Ellen

Harmon] told her vision to a cousin of mine," Loton Lambert testified, "that she must be baptised that night, or go to hell—she objected, because she had once been baptised."[7]

A dramatic spiritual battle over an unnamed girl demanded maximum pervasive efforts by both Dorinda and Ellen. "[T]here was one girl they [sic] said must be baptized that night or she must go to hell;" Loton Lambert recounted, "she wept bitterly and wanted to see her mother first; they [sic] told her she must leave her mother or go to hell—one voice said, let her go to hell. She finally concluded to be baptized."

More scattered information was provided on this girl but not her first name. Under solemn oath Joel Doore put it clearly: "Brother [John] Gallison's daughter wanted to see her mother before she was baptized, but finally concluded to be baptised before seeing her." Helpfully he added that both girls who were finally baptized that frigid night "were 17 years old, one of them had been baptised before." John Gallison's few words under oath completed needed identification for the two girls: "I was in favor of my daughter being baptized." John H. Doore (43; Atkinson) then clearly testified that his daughter "was baptised Saturday evening" and that "she had been baptized before."

In summary those two confused and probably harassed 17-year-old girls without first names were eventually baptized, almost certainly by full immersion, and by an adult male "elder" of some sort. One, the daughter of John Gallison, had wanted to talk with her mother first but then relented when her father gave his approval. The other, John H. Doore's daughter and Loton Lambert's cousin, initially objected because she had already been baptized. But her father apparently then gave his approval.

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[7] Ellen's role in demanding immediate baptism or suffer consignment to Hell was briefly covered in her local Portland newspaper's account of the trial. She was specifically identified as Ellen Harmon from Portland who "Pretended [sic] to have visions." Dammon was cited as declaring that "Ellen had a visions at Portland, and was travelling through the country relating it." (Portland daily *Eastern Argus*, 13 March 1845.) This was the best newspaper in Maine and highly regarded elsewhere for reliability and accuracy.

From this sometimes confusing data a few reasonable generalizations on baptism can be made. Clearly this "band" of Millerites under Dammon's tenuous leadership held firmly to a single supreme, absolutely essential sacrament—baptism, obviously by immersion, and repeatable under certain unexplained circumstances (perhaps if it had been of the "infant" variety or by an unacceptable minister). The only legitimate agent for administering this essential religious rite was a properly ordained male elder (ordination processes not explained). All this was based on a rational mature decision by the candidate, or by a parent or legal guardian (note that both girls were yet children, like Ellen, so received parental approval first). Just the purely physical conditions for baptism by immersion at night were surely daunting for eastern Maine in February.[8]

Evidently there were strong unrevealed Baptist roots in that group. John Gallison claimed that Dammon was a "Freewill [Baptist] elder a number of years"—Dammon indicated six years. But then an Elder Flavel Bartlett (53; Dover trader) —basis of his ordination not given—explicitly denied this: "I think prisoner [Dammon] does not belong to the Freewill Baptist Church. He is not in fellowship with them"—at least at that time.

Just to further complicate this critically important but quite confusing situation, Ellen Harmon had been baptized as a child, but for reasons that were not entirely clear James had re-baptized her later. James had also been baptized when he was younger, but apparently never re-baptized.

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[8] Jacob Martin testified in the Dammon trial record that visitors to Ayer's place had arrived by sleigh which undoubtedly meant that baptism was preceded by chopping a hole in the ice. The average February temperature for Portland—over 100 miles to the southeast with her climate moderated by the nearby ocean—for the fourteen preceding years before 1835 as reported by the Portland Observatory had been only 18 degrees. (Portland *Advertiser*, 3 January 1835.) Bruce Weaver discovered that the temperature in nearby Bangor was a chilling 18 F by nine o'clock that Sabbath evening. Meteorological journal for Bangor for February 1845 in National Archives microfilm. "Incident in Atkinson," *Adventist Currents*, April 1988, p. 17.

This zeal or mania for baptizing and re-baptizing continued after Dammon's departure for new evangelical fields. The *Ptscataquis Farmer* of Dover reported on 21 March 1845 that "the Millerites have kept up their meetings continually, in Atkinson, adjoining this town [Dover]. Fourteen persons, male and female, were baptised on Sunday night last and a number of them have been re-baptised from 4 to 6 times."

FOOT WASHING

One sacred rite established by Christ—Foot Washing or the Ordinance of Humility, which is either ignored or considered optional by most Christians—was inexplicably enthusiastically adopted by those Maine Millerites.

Apparently the total immersion of their sinful bodies in symbolically pure water by an ordained elder was not sufficient to ensure salvation. So their wayward *feet* needed a special sacrament *daily*, often in the evenings. Herewith a few Mainer examples.

"I saw men wash men's feet and women wash women's feet—they had dishes of water," Jeremiah B. Green declared. Jacob Mason (27; Garland farmer) simply located the ceremony in the life of a day: "They wash feet in the evening." John Gallison wasted no words: "We do wash each other's feet."

BEYOND THE BIG THREE

Other of their cherished religious beliefs and rites (sacraments) were subordinate to the Big Three: the Second Advent, Baptism, and Foot Washing. Those second tier beliefs, however, covered a stunning variety of concepts and insights into man's complex fallen nature. There was always that literal menacing hell, an undeveloped concept of its heavenly counterpart, holy crawling, holy kissing, holy "rolling," the delightful "no work" doctrine, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Elect, spiritual wifery, faith

healing, “comeouterism,” proper governance, and the continuing anxiety of the Shut Door with the dreadful uncertainty of just when it would definitively bang shut on unregenerate sinners. What a truly awful way to live even in beautiful Maine!

Each of these will be examined briefly and illustrated from sworn testimony. Any attempt at an overall integration into a rational unified belief system, however, would seem the sheerest folly.

FREEDOM FROM WORK

First we consider that perennial utopian dream of all shiftless men—the chimerical belief in the virtue of reaching a level of absolutely zero work. There were many eager supporters for that mirage at Atkinson.

Ebenezer Trundy (“sworn”): “Mr. [Abel S.] Boobar (30; Atkinson farmer) was telling of going into the woods to labor—Dammon said he ought not to go. Boobar said he had a family to support and was poor. Dammon told him he must live on them that had property, and if God did not come then we must all go to work together [communally].” Unfortunately the details of this socialistic contingency plan were not revealed.

Benjamin Smith, Esquire, an Atkinson Selectman and Justice of the Peace, nicely explained the implications of this happy belief on the local citizens: “I have been called upon by the citizens of Atkinson to interfere and put a stop to these meetings—they gave as a reason, that the defendant [Dammon] and others were living upon certain citizens of said town—and that they were liable to become town charge [sic].”

There were no recorded remarks by James nor visions by Ellen on this matter. Of course, as a female child this concept was completely inapplicable to her. Later she

surely realized that this macho concept was not meant to relieve women of their ceaseless rounds of drudgery. As an active ordained minister James was doubtless supported by a shifting mix of individual initiative and gifts from others. A talented entrepreneur he later displayed impressive business skills supplementing his income.

Job Moody (27; Bangor porter) testified that Dammon "repeatedly urged upon us the necessity [sic] of quitting all labor." "Elder Dammon does advise us to quit all work," was Isley Osborn's contribution. George S. Woodbury concurred with an explanation: "Elder Dammon advises us not to work, because there is enough to live on until the end of the world." This was entirely rational and reasonable only if Christ's return occurred within the limits set by that group—from a few hours to a few weeks. But beyond say two months there could be tragedy awaiting those "no workers."

James Ayer, Jr., brutally explained Dammon's sole employment: "[He] has no other business but to attend meetings." Five other witnesses elaborated on this. William C. Crosby, Esquire, testified that Dammon had "no visible means of support." T. Proctor (40; Dover farmer) concurred. J.W.E. Harvey agreed, with an explanation: "I know of no means he has of support, other than to live on his followers. Jacob Martin (52; Atkinson farmer) agreed.

A finished rationale for the No Work Doctrine is not to be found in this detailed document. Perhaps it was a generally assumed but unstated mixture of several elements such as: a testimony to unbelievers of their great faith that God would provide; provision of time for personal and family preparation for that coming cosmic event; added opportunities for missionary work; a time for more extensive Bible study; or just space for more meetings like those at Atkinson.

DEPARTING BABYLON ("Come-outerism")

Another biblical direct social action belief had a commanding ring to it: "Come out of her [Babylon] my people." (Revelation 18:4) Serious problems soon developed concerning just who were "My people" and what institutions in "Babylon" or the "world" they were to abandon. Isley Osborn was not very helpful in citing Dammon's words: "[He] thinks it best to come out from them [the other churches], because there is so many that has fallen from their holy position."

There was considerable sparring among witnesses concerning whether all churches and all their members were corrupt, or whether there was a saving remnant among some. Loton Lambert did not equivocate: "Dammon said all other denominations were wicked—they were liars, whoremasters, murderers, etc." Just in case anybody had been missed, "he also run upon [sic] all such as were not believers with him." William C. Crosby, under re-examination, expanded Lambert's list: "Dammon called churches whoremasters, liars, thieves, scoundrels, wolves in sheep's clothing, murderers, etc." Surely that did not leave much to speculation. Deacon James Rowe phrased Dammon's condemnation nicely: "he spoke of other denominations as Esq. Crosby has just testified—and said the church members were the worst in the world." Under cross-examination he stood firm: "He said all churches, made no distinction."

Job Moody opened the door of mercy slightly for other churches: "Brother Dammon said in relation to other churches they were bad enough; said they were corrupt . . . he did say they were theives [sic], etc. I am not certain, but he said that [Saturday] evening, there was exceptions." Then he suddenly veered off to comment on a sight that obviously he found distracting—"Sister Harmon . . . on the floor in a trance . . . ." Jacob

Mason agreed that Dammon did not condemn all churches: "I did not understand him to include all, but individuals." Joel Doore also had reservations or exceptions: "elder Dammon said there was bad characters in the churches; I did not understand him to say all." The testimony of Abel S. Boobar, despite his inelegant name, phrased Dammon's ecclesiastical position very reasonably. "Elder D said the churches were in a fallen state, and he had rather risk himself in the hands of the Almighty as a non-professor, than to be in the place of some of the churches."

EERILY WITNESSING OUR OWN BIRTH

Thus it was a clean break with the religious past—at least superficially—and *de novo* a renaissance, a genuine rebirth of Christianity to transform it into a pristine church of God's true remnant people ready for immediate translation out of a world doomed to eternal destruction *in just two days* (or even sooner!). So how did this newly reborn church appear to its leader, Elder Israel Dammon, that Saturday night, February 15, 1845, in remote and previously insignificant Atkinson, Maine? Its outlines are clear from the abundant testimony of the varied participants at that momentous meeting. (Specifically, 38 duly sworn or affirmed adult male witnesses testified extensively about it at that later Dover trial.)

Elder Israel Dammon—presumably an ordained minister of the Gospel but with uncertain credentials—headed this amorphous new religious sect. A major question was whether he had the basic leadership skills to lead and manage it. Two other elders were his assistants. Yet one of them—Elder Simeon Hall—was surely unfit for the ministry and should have been jettisoned immediately before he could further embarrass the fledgling group (more about that disreputable character later). The other elder—James

White from remote Palmyra, Maine—was probably little known in the Atkinson area although he was a veteran Millerite preacher.

Certainly James White did or said nothing at that infamous Saturday night "revival" to warrant a single evaluative word from any of the many witnesses about his potential as a leader. Unfortunately, he did attract attention at the trial—which neither he nor Ellen attended—by considerable sworn testimony involving him in purported disreputable conduct with the unsavory Dorinda Baker in that ominous "back bedroom." Only at the very end of the trial was he absolved from all guilt—and then almost accidentally. The average reader could easily have missed this vindication as the Court nowhere made a summary statement to that effect. James White was not on trial so his name appears only incidentally, although quite frequently. But we must postpone a closer examination of this "very close encounter with moral disaster."

What was clearly depicted about James White was his close relationship with the most important guest at that momentous gathering—a very young, actually still just a child, Ellen Harmon from Portland. He quietly sat by her side as, in the testimony of Job Moody, "[she] would lay on the floor in a trance, and the Lord would reveal their cases [sic] to her, and she to them." Clearly, even by that early date, James was beginning to assume the critically important role of Ellen Harmon's protector, mentor, guide, and manager. His support for Ellen's oft repeated claim that God spoke directly to her without any intervening mediator was surely an overwhelmingly powerful position, and essential in establishing order in that anarchic mob scene. Supporting that powerful

stance was her claim that it was a sin to doubt her role as a "visionary" or "trance medium" (the terms "prophet" or "messenger" were not used). But further details and explanations concerning this incredible phenomenon must await other developments.

Dammon also had the services of another "visionary," Dorinda Baker from Orrington, that dissolute, vulgar woman who could have caused him endless embarrassment. Her claimed visions from God were seemingly accepted as authentic although their contents as revealed in trial testimony was insubstantial.

Thus instead of the beginnings of a Millerite-disappointed remnant church led by Israel Dammon—he rather rapidly disappeared from public notice—we can observe the very basic genesis of our own church in that chaotic, often anarchic, meeting in Atkinson as reported by an anonymous scribe, unwillingly, but under heavy pressure from his unhappy peers. Fortunately for us as heirs of that precariously born church that anonymous reporter persisted in his demanding task.

So what was essentially germinal for us at Atkinson, Maine, that frigid Saturday night? It can be phrased quite succinctly and baldly with the essential background which this document provides. James and Ellen agreed upon what was happening supernaturally to and through her. James then vocalized it as her very effective spokesman. That supernal partnership forged amidst deafening noise and seeming chaos was our Genesis, whether we now like it or not!

Dammon himself nicely phrased the crux of the matter: "Dammon said Christ revealed to her and she to others" (in Loton Lambert's testimony). "They [sic] said if the Almighty had any thing to say he revealed it to her, and she acted as mediator." The Portland *Eastern Argus*—Ellen's influential hometown newspaper—for 13 March 1845

made the antecedent to that "they" very specific: "Elder White said if the Almighty had any thing to reveal, he revealed it to Miss Harmon. She acted as mediator." (This simply is an appalling statement. I only wish that she or James had categorically renounced it in a letter to this prestigious newspaper. But I have found no such record.) Others repeated the essence of this belief in differing words. Any doubt—or suggestion of "testing a prophet by biblical standards"—was stopped short by Ellen's stern warning against the very serious danger of doubting her divine calling. Thus Ellen Harmon very early in her ministry firmly established herself as the ultimate and sole evaluator of her supernatural gifts. Later, of course, she added the remarkable control technique of the potentially devastating "personal testimonies" from God through her for deviants or doubters or "critics."

With that divine infallible conduit established for the conveyance of all Truth, what was God's first message for His sadly disappointed and bewildered former Millerite flock? Five times that frigid Saturday night, according to sworn or affirmed testimony, Ellen Harmon delivered a personal message to someone there in Atkinson. Those messages were uniformly starkly bleak and Gothically dramatic: The door of mercy was shutting at midnight—eternal probation was closing—Christ was returning to earth for the second and final time--be baptized at once or you are going straight to hell.

Of course this cataclysmic event did not occur—not at midnight, nor two days later as Dammon had confidently predicted, nor even during the long lifetime of Ellen who lived until 1915. So what was there to do but keep moving the date forward, since apparently no one then was psychologically mature enough to admit that they were wrong? But finally that too had to cease and everything explained as a regrettable

mistake about the *event itself* and where it had occurred, but not about the *chronology*. A fundamental shift in Christ's *position* and *functioning* was now firmly fixed in heaven well beyond human observation or confirmation.

This naturally was quite embarrassing—if not downright disillusioning—to all true believers, and especially to the budding leadership duo of James and Ellen. What had gone wrong? Had she misinterpreted a vision? Eventually her consistent response was that she had never made such statements. In face of this detailed trial document plus numerous other sources this became a most serious ethical –if not moral—problem. Either she had basic psychological problems, an extremely unreliable memory, or had allowed herself to escape the troubling issue by a maneuver later known inelegantly as "sweeping problems under the rug." (A parallel problem drove church apologists to desperate maneuvers to handle her supposed profanity in those statements.)

All this would be far less serious if there were not a recent parallel development that came to haunt Fred Veltman as he and his highly qualified GC-appointed-committee spent almost eight years investigating charges of "literary dependence" (a clever euphemism for *plagiarism*) lodged against Ellen's voluminous undocumented writings all supposedly based on transcendent revelations. Despite overwhelming evidence that she copied freely and widely without giving credit to the legitimate authors, she consistently refused to admit this practice. This forced Veltman into a daunting ethical dilemma. We must allow him to phrase his reactions to this extremely serious matter.

In the conclusion to his massive report, Veltman put the problem bluntly: "A very serious question that still remains regarding Ellen White's use of sources is the concern over her non-admission or even denial of dependency, whether implicit, or explicit."[9]

HOLY GOVERNANCE

A potentially vital problem for any new religious group is their concept of ecclesiastical leadership and organization and its place in their belief system. "We don't acknowledge any leader, but speak according to the impulse," George S. Woodbury testified. This seems entirely consistent with the verbal bedlam described by many witnesses, and also with the apparent Quaker background of several who would only "affirm" their testimony. Significantly he added, "The elders baptise"—that is, they controlled the one sacrament that gave guaranteed access to salvation. Unfortunately no one explained the paths to "ordination" and thus to clerical power and control.

Stephen Fish (34; Corinth blacksmith) stated that "[Dammon] has always opposed the mode of paying the ministry by regular salary." But he failed to explain what plan of ministerial support Dammon favored. John Bartlett (23; farmer) of Garland described the simple structure of Dammon's "band": "I have heard the respondent [Dammon] say that one of their band was as near to him as another—he considered them all alike." So theirs was that prized revolutionary condition of real "equality."

With only a short time left on this wicked doomed world, serious concern for governmental structures for Dammon's "band" would have been absurd. With their simple communal type structure needing leadership apparently only for conducting

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[9] Fred Veltman, *Full Report on the Life of Christ Research Project, 1988*, pp. 911-16. Another similar and equally serious behavioral problem was Ellen's consistent denial that she had ever claimed that the door of mercy had been shut on 22 October 1844. A number of studies have definitively proven that she was completely wrong in that denial.

religious functions, they could readily just slide into eternity. If they needed a reference prototype the government of the earliest Christian church—a simple communist community as described in Acts 4—was entirely adequate.

Not surprisingly their belief system was likewise quite simplistic, but with weird erotic twists. Three of their spiritual beliefs—Holy Kissing, Holy Creeping and Crawling, and Spiritual Wifery—appear to have had sexual prerogatives reserved for ecclesiastical leaders—or, perhaps, they simply grasped them. Sworn or affirmed testimony certainly indicated this. First we consider that seductive religious ceremony of Holy Kissing.

HOLY KISSING

"It is a part of our faith to kiss each other"—testified James Ayer, Jr.—"brothers kiss sisters and sisters kiss brothers. I think we have bible authority for that." "Kissing is a salutation of love," Job Moody declared. "I greet them so—we have got positive scripture for it. . . ." "Hold to kissing—have scripture exhortation for it . . . it is a part of our faith," Isley Osborn explained. Jacob Mason made the sacrament more specific: "It is a practice in our order to kiss, on our meeting each other."

Some "holy kisses" clearly had special power. "We [Dorinda Baker and Joel Doore] kissed each other with the holy kiss. When she kissed me she said there was a light ahead." Whatever that might signify!

Such sanctified kissing also seemed particularly notable when the spiritual elder exercised this holy rite. Leonard Downes (19; Dover farmer) swore that he "saw Dammon kiss other people's wives." Jeremiah B. Green testified, "I saw Dammon kiss Mrs. [Isley] Osborn." And George S. Woodbury freely—perhaps proudly?--confessed,

"It is my impression that prisoner [Dammon] kissed my wife." Although no "holy kissers" cited the Apostle Paul, Romans 16:16 should have been entirely adequate for biblical support: "salute one another with an holy kiss."

HOLY CREEPING AND CRAWLING

As for "holy crawling," John H. Doore thus described that sacred, if somewhat ungainly, sacrament: "I have seen both men and women crawl across the floor on their hands and knees." Again it was especially noteworthy if this religious rite were performed with an ordained elder. "My wife and Dammon passed across the floor on their hands and knees," George S. Woodbury proudly confessed. But John Gallison warned against imputing vulgarity to this sacred exercise: "[We] do . . . creep on the floor very decently."

No one cited the obvious Bible text in support of this childish spiritual exercise, Matthew 18:3—"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Jesus' words became a literal command to their simple minds. Their application of this beautiful metaphor was patently absurd as was also much else of the so-called religious activity of that primitive evening which was turned into farce and mockery of sacred concepts.

SPIRITUAL WIFERY

That potentially seductive, but surely ethically dubious belief in "spiritual wifery" apparently had not fully caught on with the Atkinson Millerites as only one instance was mentioned in testimonies. "[Dammon] and another man from Exeter came with a young girl," James Ayer, Jr., stated. "Dammon said he had a spiritual wife and was proud of it." There was no further explication on either the "young girl" or Dammon's "spiritual

wife." Very likely some significant details and insights into that wild "band" were missed by failures to cross-examine Ayer on those points.

FAITH HEALING

Although George S. Woodbury testified that he "Heard brother Dammon say the gift of healing the sick lay in the church," it was not discussed or mentioned further. Perhaps the imminent return of Christ to banish all sickness made any concern for healing quite irrelevant. Yet not long after this James and Ellen developed a thriving itinerant faith healing practice which flourished for many years. (Why it was quite suddenly discontinued was never explained.)

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT AND HOLY EXERCISES

Those fervent Maine Millerites definitely believed in the overwhelming power of the Holy Spirit to work in their lives in dramatic displays such as had occurred at Pentecost. Under sharply heightened religious ecstasy they were "slain by the Spirit," or "struck down by the Spirit." As Isley Osborn explained, "They lose their strength and fall to the floor." How many were thus prostrated at Atkinson was not indicated. But the two "vision women," Ellen Harmon and Dorinda Baker, were regularly cast to the floor as they experienced "visions" or "trances"—the terms were not differentiated. Dammon was also specifically pointed out as "down on the floor on his back" by Loton Lambert. But no one clamed he was in vision or a trance which appears to have been a heavily feminine phenomenon in Maine then.

Obviously Ellen Harmon's spiritual epiphanies are of most interest to us. They were referred to as "visions" 18 times and as "trances" 5 times. If there was a difference

between the two phenomena in anyone's mind it was not explained. Whatever the specific nature of these striking phenomena they were well known to Ellen.

That such sacred prostration or being suddenly struck down by the Holy Spirit was familiar to those disappointed Millerites when they met at Atkinson is revealed in an 1847 letter to Joseph Bates in which Ellen referred to experiences at Exeter in early 1845 prior to going to Atkinson. "While in Exeter, Maine, in meeting with Israel Dammon, James [White], and many others, many of them did not believe in a shut door." Because of this "she suffered much," and "unbelief [in her visions?] seemed to be on ever hand." Ellen was particularly distressed because of the presence of one sister who did not believe in the "shut door." Sister Durben "was called very spiritual"; she "had traveled and been a powerful preacher the most of the time for twenty years." She "had been truly a mother in Israel"; but because of her "great sympathy" for those countless souls who had been denied access to salvation because the door of mercy had been definitely shut on 22 October 1844, she "could not believe the door was shut." Ellen, of course, wasted no time or emotional capital on such sinners, neither then nor later.[10]

With this meticulous setting of the stage for Ellen's dramatic description of what it meant to be very personally overpowered by the Holy Spirit, we are prepared for Ellen to explain how she functioned as "God's mediator"—but unfortunately, in this instance at least, for the transmission of pure error. When Sister Durben got up to talk more error—

[10]This harsh personality trait with its total lack of empathy for the suffering of the dammed was also strikingly evident in her earlier conduct at Millerite meetings in Portland's Beethoven Hall as reported by the Quaker writer M.F. Whittier, the younger brother of the poet John Greenleaf Whittier, in a Portland newspaper. He was particularly impressed by this "pretty miss of 'sweet sixteen,' or thereabouts, who, commencing in a very low, soft voice, gradually rose to the most piercing treble, as she descanted upon a sort of vision she had had the night before, in which she had seen the awful scenes of the judgment enacted. She was rather pretty and had a very benevolent and mild cast of countenance, which contrasted strangely with the fiendish exultation with which she described the coming agonies of her unbelieving friends and acquaintances." (*Portland Transcript*, 1 November 1845, pp. 228-29.) It is very difficult to classify such moral derangement in contrast with the overwhelming power she felt in delivering this harsh judgment.

but actually the truth in contrast to Ellen's pious error—Ellen was dramatically taken off in vision:

> At length my soul seemed to be in an agony, and while she was talking I fell from my chair to the floor. It was then I had a view of Jesus rising from His mediatorial throne and going to the holiest as Bride-groom to receive His kingdom. . . . Sister Durben knew what the power of the Lord was, for she had felt it many times [visions?]; and a short time after I fell she was struck down, and fell to the floor, crying to God to have mercy on her. When I came out of vision [sic], my ears were saluted with Sister Durben's singing and shouting with a loud voice. Most of them received the vision, and were settled on the shut door [i.e., now believed in full error that the door of mercy was firmly shut because of Ellen's mistaken vision].[11]

Dorinda was only mentioned as having a "vision" twice; "trance" was not used. But she did experience another psychic phenomenon several times which was considered significant but never explained. Strangely it was simply termed an "exercise." (Could she have been conversant with Ignatius Loyola's famous work *Spiritual Exercises?* Or was it simply a blatant sexual phenomenon which we now reject because both our church founders were present but unprotesting?*)* As witnessed at Atkinson its description was rather simple: "Thomas Proctor re examined [sic]. Stated to me that Miss Baker had an exercise in the bed room, and he went in and helped her out." No further explanation apparently was deemed necessary by the Court. It was related as if this were then an entirely normal event in certain types of so-called religious meetings.

THE SPECTER OF SCANDAL FOR JAMES

Yet further descriptions of Dorinda's activities may help our understanding of this deviant woman—"deviant" in our opinion now but obviously not so in the opinion of anyone then present, including James and Ellen-- in that weirdly abnormal gathering carried out under a flimsy façade of religiosity and "holiness." Be patient with the

[11] Letter 3, 1847, Gorham, Maine, 13 July 1847, White Estate.

details, some of which you may well find abhorrent. The sequence of seemingly inconsequential data develops into a critically important scenario for Elder James White, our pioneering religious founding father, and consequently for us, his spiritual heirs. It also constitutes a close encounter with infanticide for our just born infant church.

"Miss Baker and a man went into the bed room—subsequently heard a voice in the room hallo Oh! The door was opened—I," Loton Lambert reported, "saw into the room—she was on the bed—he was hold of her; they came out of the bed room hugging each other, she jumping up and would throw her legs between his." Well, that is indeed very colorful conduct, if not just plain pornography in action. How could this in the wildest interpretation ever be considered proper religious conduct in any Christian society, to say nothing of supposedly heavily Calvinistic Maine? Strangely no one apparently offered any explanation or denunciation for such bizarre behavior. Even stranger, why did Lambert not name Dorinda's partner in such blatant sexual exhibitionism mockingly parading as religion? Who was he protecting and why?

Yet even more incredible, why did not James and Ellen speak out forcefully in denunciation of such blasphemous conduct at an ostensibly religious meeting? After all, she always claimed to be on a divinely commissioned tour to fight "fanaticism." What could have been more fanatical than that scenario? Why was there no vision from God to her as His sole intermediary with humanity on such a disgusting perversion of true religion and spirituality? Could the Holy Spirit honestly be credited with inspiring such reprehensible conduct? Or had another spirit taken over that unfortunate meeting?

Next it was landlord James Ayer, Jr., with an elaborate observation of hyperactive Dorinda. "I saw Miss Baker laying on the floor. I saw her fall [slain again by the Spirit

or by some other agency?]. Miss Baker and sister [Isley] Osborn go into the bed-room—sister Osborn helped her on the bed, came out and shut the door." Significantly, he noted, "There was no man in the bed-room that evening." Then Ayer "heard the noise in the bed-room—brother Wood of Orrington [Dorinda's home town] and I went in; asked her what was the matter, she made no reply, and I went out. Brother Wood assisted her off the bed," Ayer continued with this strange narrative, "and helped her out—she appeared in distress." Then flighty Dorinda abruptly shifted her attention and evangelistic crusade to "brother Doore"—which one not specified—warning him "she was distressed on his account—was afraid he would lose his soul, and advised him to be baptised."

Was this a duplicate of Ellen Harmon's supposedly unique message direct from God? Dorinda, at least from the record, failed to include the total doomsday scenario that Ellen and James were traveling about proclaiming: the Door of Mercy closing immediately with Christ's return to earth imminent, and all unbaptized humans consigned to Hell. Obviously the James and Ellen team had the much clearer, fuller, more precise, and uncomplicated message which they delivered with consistency and force direct from God through the intermediary of His visionary agent, Ellen Harmon. Yet their effectiveness was threatened by those sordid stories of James in that back bedroom with dissolute Dorinda--or was such conduct not then considered "dissolute" by anyone then present, including James and Ellen?

Jacob Mason affirmed that he "saw elder White after sister Baker went into the bed-room, near sister Harmon in a trance—some of the time he held her head. She was in a vision [sic], part of the time insensible." The telling relevance of this observation will soon become apparent.

Under close cross-examination this question of who was in the room with Dorinda was pursued relentlessly. Obviously someone considered it very important. But Mason was vague: "Do not know who it was that went into the bed-room with sister Baker—he was a stranger to me; he soon came out, can't say how soon he went in again."

Joel Doore also was not helpful: "I think elder White was not in the bed-room that evening [with Dorinda]; but I don't know who it was that went into the bed-room." (The wording of this response indicates that someone had already named James White as the mystery man in that compromising room.)

The anonymous Reporter declared that George S. Woodbury "thinks elder White was not in the bed room, but others were in." And Abel S. Boobar concurred: "I did not see White go into the bed room with Miss Baker—heard the noise in the bed room, others did go in."

Then all this relentless questioning seeking to locate Elder James White in that infamous back room of Ayer's home—pursued by someone for uncertain motives—took a decisive turn. Upon cross-examination, Loton Lambert "affirmed all his former testimony—does not know elder White." Then he dropped a bomb shell: "but Joel Doore told me it was White that was in the bed room with Miss Baker." However this was hearsay and clearly inadmissible as evidence. White was saved—at least for the nonce.

Lambert's continued cross-examination surely again raises a very serious question. Why this relentless pursuit of a man, Elder James S. White, who was not on trial and had uttered few words that were recalled by any of the many witnesses? Lambert provided no encouragement as he continued adamant about what he had seen: "There was nothing to obstruct my views—the man had on a dark colored short jacket,

and I think [sic] light pantaloons." Thomas Proctor, re-examined, shed no light on the costume of the phantom man, only that Dorinda "had an exercise [still no explanation] in the bed room, and he went in and helped her out." Why did this particular "spiritual exercise" make Dorinda so desperately weak?

Then an attorney, A.S. Bartlett, Esquire (31; Dover trader), was sworn and testified tellingly. "I saw Mr Joel Doore and Loton Lambert conversing together," he began. "I went to them—I heard Doore say to him [Lambert] it was Elder White that was in the bed-room with Miss Baker—Lambert said that was what I wanted to know." Bartlett concluded with his own view: "I so understood, and think I am not mistaken."

This distinct trend of questioning was interrupted briefly by other matters before concluding with shocking suddenness and finality. But first, some speculative assumptions must be proposed as possible explanations for this confusing scenario.

Clearly someone had shifted the legal attack from Israel Dammon to another man, apparently Elder James White, for unknown reasons. Was it the prosecution attempting to lay a foundation for future indictments for disorderly, dissolute conduct against White? Or was it Dammon's very competent legal counsel, James S. Holmes, seeking to divert fire from his client? Regrettably the evidence is inadequate to answer these questions. So we return to the almost miraculous salvation of James White, the leader and co-founder of our church, from still further damaging charges against his good name and clerical reputation.

This phase of Dammon's trial quickly reached a firm conclusion with startling rapidity. It was left to the man with the inelegant name, James Boobar, to nail down elusive justice for Elder James Springer White: "Elder White had a [long] frock coat and

dark pants." Remember, the dissolute suspect had been described as wearing a short jacket and light colored pants. So it was a clear case of misidentification!

Although this constitutes a happy—but most scary-- ending for our religious heritage, it is truly frightening to realize that this conclusion would not have been clearly evident to most readers of the report. The damming indictments as listed above were scattered throughout this long report. And neither the Reporter nor the Court saw fit to explicitly exonerate James White from those very specific eye-witness false testimonies that so viciously damaged his reputation.

That was surely a very close call, Elder! Saved from disastrous scandal by the accidents of dress. In future take more care with the company you keep. Had that sex-loaded scenario been sustained against our pioneer founder together with a charge of bringing a child into a dangerously dissolute environment plus traveling about Puritanical Maine without a proper chaperone, our very birth as a church could well have been dangerously imperiled if not actually aborted. Again it was a frighteningly close call with disaster.

Yet for Portland and Maine's single most prestigious newspaper, the daily *Eastern Argus,* James unfortunately did not escape serious defamation of character. In their 13 March 1845 issue they failed to cover James Boobar's testimony that would have acquitted Elder White. But they did print this single damming sentence without further explication: "[Dorinda Baker] went into the bed room with a man, whom they called Elder White, and when they come [sic] out they were hugging each other."[12]

[12] Although no systematic attempt has been made to check the media distribution of this report—or shortened versions of it—casual encounters have been impressive: Portland *Eastern Argus*, 13 March 1845; *New-York Observer*, 22 March 1845; Greenfield, MA, *Franklin Democrat* (declared that the trial had

After this overview of the tenuous belief system of that Maine "religious" gathering—and a diversion into an inexplicable religious phenomenon not apparently considered by William James in his exhaustive *Varieties of Religious Experiences* (1902)--we should attempt to formulate the basic elements of what for them constituted a proper religious service. Or how they pictured God as being best worshipped. Oh for video footage with a powerful audio system!

GOING TO CHURCH WITH DAMMON AND FRIENDS

The specific form of typical religious services for that Great Disappointed Band at Atkinson, Maine, demands careful attention although generalizations may still fail of being reasonably normative. With his resounding patriarchal name, Ebenezer Blethen gave his stark analysis: "Saw nothing like licentiousness—there was exhortation and prayer each evening." But, brother Ebenezer, you carry your minimalism much too far. Each of those beliefs we have just discussed could eventuate in physical actions during sacred church time that you have ignored.

KNEELING

There was, for instance, the simple posture of kneeling before another person. Remember, Loton Lambert ("sworn") testified that when Ellen Harmon urged Joel Doore to believe in her visions and not "go to hell," Joel "kneeled to her feet and prayed." Horrors! Was he worshiping Ellen? God forbid. Fortunately James Ayer, Jr., the host for that word-defying "religious" meeting cleared up this question: "The reason of our kneeling, I consider an object of humiliation." Thanks, James, for your help. But disturbing thoughts could be resisted more efficaciously if you had given Ellen's

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"disclosed scenes distressing to every well regulated mind"); the *Advent Herald*, 26 March 1845 (claimed that the trial featured "disgusting extravagances" and had been "reported in all [note!] papers").

response to his actions. Did she welcome it or deliver a strong rebuke? How did Elder White, her protector, respond?

SINGING

Apparently singing of a robust variety was part of their services—at least according to tradition. But confining ourselves to this particular document for evidence provides little proof for this belief. In fact there is just a single reference by Loton Lambert: "They were singing when I archived—after singing they sat down on the floor—Dammon said a sister had a vision to relate—a woman on the floor then related her vision." Of course that "woman on the floor" was later identified as Ellen Harmon from Portland. So, if it makes any difference for anyone, we can assume that she and James joined in with this singing of unidentified hymns.

Actually the most striking employment of religious music by that group came at the conclusion of Dammon's trial. Then, with permission of the Court, Dammon and his witnesses (all adult males) sang "Come Out Of Her My People" by John Craig.

FLOOR USAGE

The numerous references to their excessive use of the floor may suggest that it had some special significance for those dejected and very confused Millerites. Ebenezer Blethen thus described the seating arrangements at the first meeting he had attended some two weeks before. He "saw people setting [sic] on the floor, and laying on the floor; Dammon setting on the floor; they were leaning on each other." His evaluation was not flattering: "It did not have the appearance of a religious meeting."

Jacob Mason's description was succinct: "A part of the time we sat on the floor—both men and women promiscuously." J.W.E. Harvey recalled more lurid scenes: "I

have seen prisoner [Dammon] on the floor with a woman between his legs—I have seen them in groups hugging and kissing one another."

Of, course, the frequent instances of being "slain by the Spirit" instantly resulted in a True Believer being triumphantly knocked to the floor. "I have seen some laying [sic] on the floor, two or more at a time," John Gallison testified, adding, "have seen nothing bad in the meetings." But the Court wanted no more of that shocking picture (undoubtedly they were especially disturbed by the unseemly participation in public of women in such an improper and vulgar performance), absolutely prohibiting his proffered offer of a more dramatic depiction: "Witness here described the position Miss Harmon lay in on the floor, when she was in a trance, and offered to lay down and show the Court if they wished to see. Court waived it." (The Portland *Eastern Argus* for 13 March 1845 had printed this statement without elaboration: "The visionist, Miss Harmon lying on the floor several hours—from 7 to 1 o'clock, that night.")

Then Levi M. Doore (35; Atkinson) destroyed all possibilities of mystical interpretations of this topic by a few practical words. "The reason we sit on the floor is to convene more people," he simply explained, "—sometimes we take some in our laps, but not male and female . . . ." Occasionally they sat on the floor "for formality"—whatever that could have meant—but their faith did not "hold it to be essential."

HOLY ROLLING

"Holy Rolling" on the floor at such obviously Pentecostal-style meetings might be assumed. But it was not common at Atkinson; or at least it was not reported. Only Abel S. Boobar even mentioned that rapturous sacred exercise, and then just in passing. He simply "affirmed" the stories of kissing, rolling on the floor, and washing of feet—most

likely in response to a question from the Court. (Weaver has a delightful short section the "holy laugh." But it seems not to have made its appearance at Atkinson, at least as far as the court record is concerned.[13])

JAMES NIX'S SERIOUS CONCERNS

There are several areas in the trial report which Nix found totally at variance with the official historical image of Ellen Gould Harmon White firmly maintained at the White Estate which he now heads. Consequently he felt compelled to forcefully attack their validity utilizing those varied tools and techniques available to the skilled apologist which that key institution—legally outside church or lay control or even careful surveillance—has masterfully developed.

For his mentor Nix had the church's all-time master apologist, Elder Francis David Nichol. Although Nichol functioned brilliantly as a skilled editor and writer for decades in many diverse areas, his apologetic defense of Ellen White stands firmly as his most impressive magnum opus (particularly *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*). So a brief overview of Nichol's techniques and philosophy is mandatory here.

Like a skilled defense lawyer, Nichol heavily emphasized the positive elements of his subject (supporting his contentions with impressive research and writing) while dealing dismissively with weak areas (or ignoring them completely). Then once the reader was set up to consider Nichol a genuine scholar, he would slip in key *assertions* as known *facts* not needing any documentation.

Also as skilled counsel, Nichol could spot weaknesses in his opponent's case which he would attack relentlessly. For instance, he used "ascension robes"—a totally non-important element in the Millerite story—as a clever "red herring" in his major book

[13] "Incident in Atkinson," *Adventist Currents*, April 1988, p. 30.

The Midnight Cry, devoting significant space to this insignificant topic. He thereby undermined readers' confidence in anyone who opposed Millerism.

As a superb writer Nichol carefully chose words to destroy reader confidence in any documents he considered "hostile to the truth"—that is, that disagreed with him. And his "bully pulpit" for many years was editor-in-chief of the church's most influential publication, the *Review and Herald*. From that powerful podium he could readily influence anything printed—or even proposed—at any of the denomination's presses world-wide. Of course, Nichol was not a valid scholar *seeking* or *pursuing* the truth, but a skilled apologist who already possessed the truth before he ever began to write. The difference is fundamental, but often not perceived. The apologist *defends* the truth which he already fully possesses; but he discovers no new truth himself.

All of this plus his close symbiotic relationship with the White Estate made FDN the most powerful man in the church for decades. His devastating mastery of the English language also equipped him as a fearsome, potentially career-ending opponent. Only after his death in 1966 was there an opportunity for true scholarship to begin an effective voice in Adventism in certain areas.

ELLEN HARMON'S SUPOSED PROFANITY

The issue of Ellen Harmon's claimed repeated use of profanity at Atkinson, in my opinion, is a contrived one, a straw woman to be attacked vigorously with righteous indignation, an entirely false issue. However it nicely exemplifies the radically differing approaches to an important historical document by an apologist in contrast to a traditional academically trained scholar. (Incidentally, Nix does not deny his official role: "I acknowledge being an apologist of Ellen White.") (p. 17)

"As one reads the newspaper reporter's account of the trial," Nix observed, "you are struck with the fact that several times witnesses are quoted as testifying that Ellen urged people not to 'go to hell,' or said that if they were not baptized that night they would 'go to hell.'"

As an official apologists for Ellen, Nix was ready with a good apologetic defense against such profanity. "Since no where else in Ellen White's writings do we find her using similar language, it is curious [doubtful] if she actually did so that evening." Yet these statements did not come from her "writings" which were always carefully edited to preserve the appropriate image for her. Their source was from legally sworn or affirmed witnesses in a formal trial openly conducted in the sovereign state of Maine under the rigorous processes demanded by American jurisprudence. This report was widely reprinted in Maine and elsewhere in New England so Ellen and James had adequate opportunity to correct any details they desired. They never responded, to the best of my knowledge, either in the secular press or in their own publications. Also it is important to remember that any witness not telling the truth under oath or affirmation laid himself open to the severe penalties for contempt of court and perjury.

Thus quite subtly and cleverly seeds of doubt about the credibility of this document were planted, although not of course about the *credibility* of any of Ellen's subsequent comments—or silence—about this Atkinson affair—some relying on her memory a considerable time after the events. Also carefully note here that Nix casually downgrades the trial report from a specially assigned project by a disturbed community highly interested in ending such unwholesome affairs to just another newspaper report—with implications of unreliability. This represents standard apologetic methodology.

Then Nix quickly shifted from probability to certainty in his vigorous defense of Ellen's character. "In fact," he firmly declared, "it is highly unlikely that she did [use "hell"] given that by this time she had given up belief in an eternally burning hell." Even though he elaborated on this contention in footnote 88, we refuse to be diverted by this obvious red herring: the issue is not what sort of hell she believed in at Atkinson, but whether she uttered the words attributed to her by so many sworn witnesses.

After suggesting that the problem may have been created by her words being "misinterpreted by the reporter" (in all of the many instances?), Nix moved to a firmly stated conclusion of the whole unsavory matter: "Probably we will never know for sure what Ellen White [then Harmon] said that evening, but her strong statements as reported in the newspaper are certainly inconsistent with everything else we know from her life." Yet the preponderance of the evidence—in fact all of the evidence—states unequivocally that Ellen Harmon repeatedly used the word "hell" in Atkinson that Saturday night.

So Nix would have us retrospectively recreate Ellen's very early life from what we have come to know so publicly about her mature life, and despite the very clear record of this detailed document from that childhood? Should she not to be permitted to be a normal growing child and act differently as a child from her later adult life? Or even make mistakes that were later corrected? Nix's plan seem quite unreasonable and inconsistent.

Rather should we not ask if there could be another way to interpret these data that would provide reasonable consistency? For that we should carefully examine this key document to determine what it actually tells us, not what we would like it to say.

Three different witnesses—Loton Lambert (sworn), Isley Osborn (affirmed), and George S. Woodbury (sworn)—testified to having heard Ellen Harmon use such terminology on several occasions. Could the Reporter have "misinterpreted" all of them? No other witnesses denied these statements. There simply was no difference of opinion on this specific issue among the 38 witnesses who were called to testify. Also note that on another issue—"The Imitation of Christ"—about which Nix raised a similar claim of it being "out-of-character," the Reporter was careful to note many differences of opinion among the several witnesses; but not for the "hell" issue.

An academic-scholarly-common-sense approach that would dismiss the need for such desperate linguistic contortions seems obvious. First, simply accept this document as valid and substantially accurate. Then follow with this reasonable question: How can these statements be understood so as to integrate them smoothly and consistently into the picture of Ellen as developed in the rest of the document? Again, the solution is embarrassingly simple: Her statements were entirely proper theological discourse in the Puritan hell-fire tradition from Jonathan Edwards ("Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," etc.) until that day in Atkinson. It was definitely not in any profanity mode. Admittedly, however, it might well have been deemed quite inappropriate from the mouth of a young girl since such theological discourse was the exclusive domain of adult male Mainers. (As noted before Ellen's highly regarded hometown newspaper, the Portland *Eastern Argus*, for 13 March 1845, also printed her repeated "hell" statements without comment. Significantly no one—not even James White or her father Robert Harmon—appeared in later issues protesting this calumny.)

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

Another problem that heavily concerned Nix—whether Ellen was called "The Imitation of Christ" by some of her Millerite colleagues—differed somewhat from the profanity issue. Apparently Nix's basic fear here was that it approached closely to blasphemy if it were not challenged. In fact the *Eastern Argus* for 13 March 1845 did simply classify it as "blasphemy." But, again, in my opinion, the problem is a false and patently contrived one fairly easily resolved. But first the charges.

Having definitively rejected those few words as a hostile, pejorative attack against Ellen, Nix explained them away again as mistakes in what witnesses thought they had heard caused by the admittedly high noise levels. Although that might seem a plausible explanation, it is actually unnecessarily much too forced a solution. Again, we must examine the document itself very carefully rather than take desperate refuge in conjecture, "what ifs," or fantasy in vain attempts to *save* Little Ellen from losing a false image that Nix had gratuitously forced externally upon her.

True, Loton Lambert from Dover the county seat was the only "sworn" witness to claim that Ellen Harmon was referred to as "Imitation of Christ"—and without explanation or elaboration (which might have included the fact that he had visited other meetings prior to Atkinson where James and Ellen were featured). But Lambert specifically claimed that "Dammon and others" called her "imitation of Christ." Actually he used that specific wording six separate times in his first time on the witness stand. Clearly this destroys Nix's argument that the Reporter misinterpreted his words because of high noise levels. Alternately, Lambert specifically referred to Ellen as "a woman on

the floor," the "woman that lay on the floor relating visions," who was "said to be a woman from Portland," and the "vision woman." Thus there was no confusion concerning whom he was talking about.

Then under cross-examination Lambert held firmly to his testimony, again twice claiming that Ellen was called "Imitation of Christ." He also repeated his statement involving Dammon: "can't say certainly who first said she was Imitation of Christ, but can say Dammon repeatedly said so . . . ." Thus, once again, Nix's hope that high noise levels were the answer to his dilemmas was proved invalid.

Four men did testify in the negative on this issue: Isley Osborn (from Atkinson), James Ayer, Jr. (Atkinson), Jacob Mason (Garland), and John Gallison (Dover). Significantly all four of these men were from towns that Ellen and James had not visited before or as yet on their itinerary thus having denied themselves the opportunity of hearing the comments of her disciples in another inchoate meeting. Also their testimonies appear *only* to have been concerning that Saturday evening hullabaloo at Atkinson. Why more witnesses were not examined on this point is not clear; apparently its deleterious import was not sensed until the White Estate detected its profundity. Moreover, why should testimony about Ellen Harmon have come to dominate that trial when she was not a defendant—or even named as an accessory—is certainly puzzling.

"I heard nothing said by her [James Ayer, Jr., had just named "the woman with a pillow under head—her name is Miss Ellen Harmon of Portland"] or others about 0imitation of Christ," was his direct statement. Later under cross-examination he simply stated, "Did not hear her called imitation of Christ."

"Do not call sister Harmon imitation of Christ" was Isley Osborn's testimony. This is ambiguous since the subject of the sentence is missing. Should it have been "I," "we," or "they"?

"Sister Harmon was not called imitation of Christ to my knowledge," Jacob Mason carefully stated. "I think I should have heard it if she was."

"Did not hear her [Miss Harmon] called imitation of Christ," John Gallison affirmed. "I know she won't [wasn't], for we don't worship idols." That non sequiter may be a clue to why Charles P. Chandler, one of the prosecuting justices, had briefly entertained the "thought of objecting to this witness on the ground of insanity," but concluded "he would let him proceed, as he believed it would sufficiently appear [his insanity] in the course of the examination."

Thus there is insufficient evidence for a fair conclusion on an insignificant point—despite Nix's concern for it as a slur against Ellen. If the term was actually applied to her sometimes, it was not said pejoratively or sneeringly but as a sincere compliment to her pious life.

It is also well within the realm of possibility that this was an oblique reference to a famous Christian devotional work by Thomas A Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ (Imitatio Christi* in the original Latin of 1471). Ellen could well have used this catchy title at some time, or even carried a copy of the famous work as it was available in English translation by John Wesley at a book store in Portland.[14]

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[14] Wesley's 306 page English version was printed for him at Philadelphia in 1789 by Prichard and Hall, with this subtitle: "An extract of the Christian's pattern: or, A treatise of the Imitation of Christ." A photocopy at the Fogler Library, University of Maine, Orono. Under title of "Wesley's Christian Perfection" it was offered by Day, Lyon & Co. in Portland's *Maine Wesleyan Journal*, 20 March 1840. It was probably the 1840 edition printed in New York by T. Mason & G. Lane "for the Methodist Episcopal Church."

If unsubstantially founded *conjecture* is acceptable for apologetics can it be allowed occasionally for sober academic work? For example, consider this line of neat conjecturing. All four of the men who testified that Ellen was not called Imitation of Christ—Ayer, Gallison, Mason, and Osborn—refused to swear the regular oath but were "affirmed," indicating that they were probably members of some very conservative group such as Quakers or Mennonites. Thus could their failure to hear those startling words in reference to young Ellen that Lambert had repeatedly heard loud and clear have been the result of an automatic sub-conscious rejection of what to them in their simplistic ignorance was blasphemy? Also they could well have rejected Ellen as a young female whose public conduct was completely unacceptable.

DAMMON'S DISPUTED ARREST

Another basic disagreement developed in Nix's mind concerning Dammon's arrest at Atkinson by the local sheriff with considerable assistance from local citizens. First we should allow a rather taciturn sheriff, Joseph Moulton, to relate his factual, quite low key account of his difficulties in enforcing the law by fulfilling the arrest warrant against the "prisoner." Carefully note the very specific details in preparation for examining Nix's elaborate summary of "higher" evidence in explanation for what seemed so routine, so "real" to the spiritually insensitive sheriff.

"When I went to arrest prisoner [Dammon]," Moulton began, "they shut the door against me. Finding I could not gain access to him without [using force], I burst open the door." So right off that group acted illegally by complicity in aiding Dammon in resisting arrest. "I went to the prisoner and took him by the hand and told him my business." That was apparently the pre-arranged signal for Dammon's devoted female

followers to rush to his assistance: “A number of women jumped on to him—he clung to them, and they to him. So great was the resistance, that I with three assistants, could not get him out.” Yet in face of that concerted resistance to an entirely legal arrest—which would have fully justified Moulton in making multiple arrests, even of women—he kept calm and acted with commendable moderation. “I remained in the house and sent for more help,” he laconically explained, “after they arrived we made a second attempt; with the same result—I again sent for more help—after they arrived we overpowered them [Dammon plus the devoted women piled onto him] and got him out door [sic] in custody.” Then he added—apparently to be certain the complete picture had been understood by the Court—“We were resisted by both men and women.” But, still in control of himself, Moulton made no more arrests—which would have been amply justified. His closing words were equally restrained: “Can’t describe the place—it was one continued shout.”

Before Nix explains what *really* happened—the truth behind the barriers of human sensibility—we must take note of a significant action by Dammon. When Deacon James Rowe revealed this incident in his sworn testimony it may not have appeared significant—or even remotely relevant to any important issues. Now that has changed.

After making his striking evaluation of that meeting—“I have been young, and now am old, and of all the places I ever was in, I never saw such a confusion, not even in a drunken frolic”—Rowe delivered a remarkable single sentence concerning what everyone else had apparently missed: “Dammon stood up on the floor and said, I am going to stand here—and while I stand here, they can’t hurt you, neither man nor devils can’t hurt you.” Thus he boldly claimed supernatural powers and physical immunity for

both himself and his true followers in times of crisis. Strangely this phenomenon was seemingly observed in its prophetic fulfillment only by Ellen Harmon.

Now back to James Nix as he called in lost trial testimony that did not get into the trial record since neither Ellen nor James was there. Immediately a very serious validity problem arises because Nix does not discuss how many *years* after that Atkinson spectacle Ellen put this testimony into writing. Unavoidably there went into natural operation the law of direct decay of human memory in a sharply downward direction for every unit of time elapsed after the claimed remembered events. Despite this danger, we must give careful consideration to Nix's evidence and arguments because he inexplicably devoted such inordinate space to them—some five total pages of text.

First we must permit Ellen to relate how she remembered Dammon's arrest some 15 years after the event—and all in remarkable detail, and with no pleas for mercy because of any possible problems with decayed memory:

> The Spirit of the Lord rested upon him [Dammon], and his strength was taken from him, and he fell to the floor helpless. The officer cried out, "In the name of the State of Maine, lay hold of this man." Two seized his arms, and two his feet, and attempted to drag him from the room. They would move him a few inches only, and then rush out of the house. The power of GOD was in that room, and the servants of GOD with their countenances lighted up with his glory, made no resistance. The efforts to take Elder D. were often repeated with the same effect. The men could not endure the power of GOD, and it was a relief to them to rush out of the house. Their number increased to twelve, still Elder D. was held by the power of GOD about forty minutes, and not all the strength of those men could move him from the floor where he lay helpless. At the same moment we all felt that Eld. D. must go; that GOD had manifested his power for his glory . . . and those men took him up as easily as they would take up a child, and carried him out. [Nix cites Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1860, 2:40,41.]

Unfortunately Ellen was not on the witness stand under oath and subject to close cross-examination when she related this astonishing account. It differs so wildly in detail from the sheriff's somewhat prosaic account that it seems as if she were describing an entirely different event. But we must postpone any attempt at rational analysis of this startling narrative to pursue its amazing continued elaboration in Ellen's truly remarkably creative memory.

"One thing, however, is absolutely certain," James Nix firmly stated, "Ellen White never wavered in her belief that something supernatural was involved in Damman's [sic] arrest. As late as 1906 in an interview with her secretary, Clarence Crisler, Mrs. White still recalled basically the same circumstances regarding Damman's [sic] arrest [1845] as she had described [it] in 1860."

Yet in 1906, more than 60 years after the event, music was added as a critical factor in frustrating the sheriff and his posse. "They tried to get this Damman,[15] [sic] and they could not get him," she wrote. "There he lay on the floor three quarters of an hour." When they "would rush up and grab hold of" him, the faithful "would all begin to sing, 'We left old mystic Babylon ["come out of Babylon"], to sound the Jubilee." Then, "their hands would slip off and they would start up."

This latest version is surely a much more dramatic account, but which one do we believe? Could this possibly be an unconscious conflation of Ellen's self-perceived roles at Atkinson after more than 60 years of maturing in her overcrowded memory? Remember, those words are from that dramatic hymn which "prisoner and his witnesses" sang—or "shouted"—to the Court that last afternoon of the trial ("Come Out of Her, My

[15] Here is a clue to why Nix religiously stuck to the spelling DAMMAN rather than DAMMON which is the correct spelling in all the official documents and newspapers. "Damman" was the way Ellen White spelled it and she was authoritative in his life, even in small details such as mis-spellings.

People," based on Revelation 18:4). Specifically they are the last two lines of six-line stanza number 4 of 10 total stanzas. How could such an obvious conflation—or simply "invention"—have occurred? Did neither she nor Crisler nor anyone else ever think to check what she had written back in 1860 and published in permanent book form? None of this appeared in any form whatsoever in any of the sworn or affirmed testimony given by any of those 38 witnesses at the trial.

Then an even more shocking phenomenon occurred. After more than 60 years of obviously wrestling with her vivid but confused memories of that wild Saturday night at Atkinson, Ellen finally got it all sorted out and rearranged. With careful deliberation she firmly placed herself in a new key role which her matured consciousness had finally convinced her she completely deserved. Therefore, conscientious reader, carefully note every word of this final and "definitive" version of a long neglected pivotal experience in our collective early history, as related to her secretary Clarence Crisler in 1906.

"Now said I, [when] they came up to him [Dammon] and began to take hold of him, they [the sheriff and his deputies] did not want me in the room, they want me to go out of the room, they said it was I that was keeping him [from being moved]. [So] I stepped right out of the room [from her prone position on the floor?] and I said [apparently as she was leaving], Elder Dammon [note the careful deference], the Lord will have you go with these men to this trial [sic] and he did. He went to that trial [of course, under arrest]." (But, confusingly, for unexplained reasons, neither she nor James stayed to lend him their support or direct communication with "the Lord.")

Recall that in her 1860 published account it was "the power of God in that room"—repeated three times—that explained everything supernatural that happened

during those tumultuous sessions. Now she has fully revealed that this amazing power had operated in and through her as mediator between God and all mankind. Or that Ellen Harmon, a sickly child from Portland, was really in charge of everything at Atkinson. And that it was she who ordered Dammon to go peacefully with the sheriff. Finally, then, we possess the whole revealed truth about these critical matters.

I am dumbfounded. I am aghast. I am assaulted by overwhelming cognitive dissonance. What is a supposedly rational person to make of all this? Need we repeat that there was not even a hint of any of this in the testimony from the 38 witnesses. And—perhaps even more difficult to comprehend—that Ellen has little consistency in her own widely variant accounts.

But wait up. There is even more battering and confounding of rationality which Nix had uncovered in the White Estate archives that offers significant changes to the flexible and expanding narrative. It comes from another interview (person not named) from about the same time (1906) in which Ellen White recalled even more startling new details for the old dramatic story:

> When they came into the meeting to take him, he was kneeling down. They took hold of his hands and feet and tried to lift him up to take him out of the roo[m]. But they could [n]ot do this . . . . They would draw him a few stewps (sic)[sic], but as soon as they took their hands off him, he would slide back into the same place. They tried for two hours [sic] to take him out of t[h]e room, but without avail. Then we all felt that it would be for the glory of God for him to be taken out.

Note that the time Dammon was on the floor resisting arrest and covered with women (including Ellen?)—a facet of the narrative which she conveniently forgot--has now expanded from 45 minutes to two hours. Also note that the decision for Dammon to give himself up was now a consensus of the entire group rather than a solo performance

by Ellen. And again there was no mention of those women piling on him and grabbing him in an impressive demonstration of passive resistance that would have pleased Gandhi. Naturally the sheriff and his deputies in that culture would have been very reluctant to use force to remove those obstructing females.

Also, I must forcefully urge that all of this floundering about in her confused memory dictates an inescapable conclusion: Ellen Gould Harmon White's fallible memory is simply not to be trusted when dealing with historical facts. The sole semi-reasonable rescue would reside in a desperate belief that her *memory* was supernaturally inspired as well as her *supernatural thoughts on spiritual topics.* Yet that desperate proposition musts face a daunting question—what among several sets of facts related to the same incident was correct or true? How is the historian to decide? What tests of *truthfulness* can he summon to his aid?

"So," Nix asks—we can well imagine at least somewhat in desperation—"is there any way we can reconcile these two accounts [Moulton's in the trial record and the totality of Ellen White's several accounts between 1860 and 1906]?" His response "Probably not totally." But he has some suggestions which we must carefully consider.

"First," in Nix's mind, "we might try to understand things from Ellen White's perspective." To this approach I must give my whole-hearted support. Every honest historian must continually strive to understand his or her subject in their time and place, and circumstance. This is never completely attainable, but it must always be constantly in view as the ultimate goal or objective, even if achievable only partially. This is my area of greatest difficulty in working with Ellen Gould Harmon White as an historical subject. So I welcome James Nix's suggestions.

He proposes that Ellen Harmon's "spiritual frame of mind at the time doubtless [made] her perspective on events . . . very different from that of the sheriff, or any other of the witnesses." Since spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and everything then to her was suffused with spirituality, only she had the true perspective on those confusing events at Atkinson. Conversely, since secular historians, my personal category, deal solely with agreed upon facts perceived and tested as objective realities, I am in dire straits in attempting to understand her mind and her perception of "reality" and "truth." So with considerable desperation I must rely upon Nix to help me understand a completely new methodology for attaining understanding concerning the real truth in my church's past.

Nix provides a number of examples illustrating how Ellen's spiritual vision enabled her to perceive truth and see phenomena to which others were blinded. Or, we might say, she possessed superlative spiritual insight that made the ordinary methodologies of pursuing truth quite meaningless.

"Another way to look at the differences in the two accounts," Nix suggested, "is not to try to offer any explanation, but rather just simply recognize that supernatural occurrences will be viewed differently by believers and non-believers." All of which appears superficially reasonable ("I believe, help my unbelief"), but which in application becomes maddeningly complex and unworkable. To cite a simple potential problem, How could any trial ever reach a valid verdict if such testimony as Ellen gave about Dammon's arrest were to be accepted as the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth based solely upon special "spiritual" insights to the truth? It would mean that we as a nation had learned absolutely nothing from those infamous Salem Witchcraft Trials.

For the True Believer everything good, in his judgment, becomes a miracle and the "hand of God in history" supplies the answer to all questions. There are no causal relationships and man's actions are irrelevant. All "naturalistic" explanations are a sign of lack of faith. Human reason and scholarly training are just delusions. So he gives up attempting to understand anything by reason, and accepts without question the offerings of anyone claiming "spiritual insight" into ultimate truth. This is a slippery and ultimately disastrous downward path to venture upon for any human being with a well functioning mind.

Nix's major example is an old one which has fascinated Adventists for generations: Ellen White's "spiritual insights" into the Truth about the Civil War as exemplified in her vision and explication for the Northern defeat at 1st Bull Run (Manassas). That topic and its many distortions demands another research paper in response. It also wanders very far from Atkinson, Maine. So we reluctantly end our jousting with James Nix on his disagreements, and move on to other problem areas.

JAMES NIX SLAYS ALL "CRITICS"

There is a fascinating phenomenon that appears briefly in several places in Nix's comments that provides considerable insight into the psyche of an apologist. That is the special usage by them and the important significance they give to the key term *critic*. It may not be apparent to most readers so it should be examined carefully as it goes far to explain how "official" and "definitive" accounts of our history have been established.

For example Nix wrote this on page 10 of his paper: "the critics rush" to claim that Ellen White was lying. Or, on the next page, "Critics like to pounce on her denial

statements . . . .” And, again, on page 15, “the critic is wont to claim that Ellen White was lying, or trying to claim more for things [sic] than the situation warranted.”

Nix does not define the constituency of this dangerous group of “critics”; but they are clearly hostile to the Truth and somewhat feral (they “rush in” and they “pounce”). They also seem to have a nasty propensity for calling others “liars.” Obviously they should be avoided whenever possible, never given access to a “pulpit” or key libraries and archives, and thoroughly “shunned” in the Amish tradition for handling pure error.

Such usage follows faithfully in a venerable Adventist tradition with its ancient roots in those tumultuous meetings at Atkinson. Remember, one of the foundations for the birth of a following for Ellen Harmon as guided by James White was to implement belief in her divine gifts with no room for doubts or questioning of any sort. “After the visionist [Ellen] called them up [those about whom she had received a “vision”] she told them they doubted [apparently the validity of her “call” as a prophet],” William C. Crosby testified. “Her object seemed to be to convince them that they must not doubt.” Again the influence on this mere child of James White, the much older and more experienced ordained minister who was clearly her mentor from the first, seems obvious.

Looking again at the traditional SDA hostility towards “critics” and “criticism”—with heavy and continuing support from Ellen White’s inspired counsel—it clearly plays a very decisive role in our impressive apologetic tradition: The vast majority of members (the laity) are to believe without question what is taught authoritatively by their ordained clergy who in turn received their knowledge solely from God’s chosen special “messenger.” “Critics” are those who do any thinking about these teachings and have the

temerity to raise questions, trivial or fundamental. This is a very serious sin—probably closely allied with the "original sin" of Adam and Eve questioning God's statements to them in the Garden. It will simply not be tolerated within the church or its institutions (such as schools). It must be "stomped out" at its very first appearance as there is no greater menace that can confront the church. All of this obviously is based on the foundational conviction that the church either possesses complete knowledge already of all Truth, or has the facility for adding to that Truth through its highly organized hierarchy of specifically ordained elders.

The basic foundation, methodology, and philosophy of what is termed "academic scholarship" is the complete opposite. There knowledge and understanding of the truth (a term that is only lightly used in academia) in all legitimate academic disciplines is not a static corpus or body of strictly delimited knowledge and understanding, but it is an ever growing, expanding entity. That constant growth basically comes through inquiry with the asking of tough relevant questions followed by accepted research procedures (the "methodology") of that particular discipline. Or, to phrase it differently, intellectual growth comes only through a tightly controlled system of "criticism" or hard questions from "critics" or scholars. As examples we have the ubiquitous scientific laboratory and the seminar.

The clergy and academia as distinct groups in Adventism did not interact dangerously as long as the clergy maintained tight control over "higher" education. The point of no return for the fundamental clash came in the 1930s when "accreditation" for our colleges was sought by the increasingly powerful medical work. When growing

numbers of our college teachers went off to “worldly” universities for doctorates, conflict was simply inevitable.

So the apologist lives in dreaded fear of “criticism” while his distrusted academic colleagues demand it—under strict control—for all their serious work. Therein lies incipient drama of Greek proportions—but hopefully not tragedy. Fully realizing the implications of all this, James Nix categorizes any questioning of what we have come to term the Spirit of Prophecy as hostile “criticism” by a “critic” which will not be tolerated because the “critic” has lost his way. Amazingly we have seen this specter boldly appearing first at that fateful Saturday night in Atkinson, Maine, in 1845.

ARTISTSIC LICENSE DISTORTS THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

Happily after such a basic confrontation, an important topic appears concerning which we apparently can readily reach complete accord with Nix’s position—the excesses of artistic license relating to Ellen and the depiction of her in vision. “Another thing that probably strikes most Adventists when first reading the account of the meeting at Atkinson,” Nix stated, ”is that Ellen White was described as having been lying on the floor while in vision.” To him this was “totally opposite of what I imagined.”

I must confess to the same utter dismay. Frankly I simply could not read the entire Dammon Trial document for a considerable time after first coming upon it. My initial reaction was to return the microfilm reel to Maine and say nothing about it. But a calmer head prevailed—my wife’s—and I did make a careful copy to be quietly filed away. There it remained for years because I could see no possible way of integrating it into the story of the Spirit of Prophecy as I had been raised to understand it.

Nix and I certainly agree at least upon the *immediate* cause for our confusion. "Thanks to the artists who have depicted her occasionally while in vision," he explained, "in my imagination I saw her up and walking around, or possibly standing holding a Bible. But I certainly did not picture her sitting in a chair, or lying on a floor in a home, or on the platform in a church." But the more he read the more he came to realize "that more often than not, she probably was lying down while in vision." In support, Nix quotes Martha Amadon, "who possibly saw Ellen White in more visions than anyone else besides [except?] James White"—"specifically recalled Mrs. White's 'position in vision [as] being a recumbent one.'" (As we have already repeatedly seen Ellen herself or other eye-witnesses completely agree that her visions commenced when she was dashed to the floor by the Holy Spirit from either a standing position or seated in a chair.)

In my research I have encountered only two instances of a "standing vision"—one quite late in life. All others, from the very early ones in Beethoven Hall, had her cast to the floor by the Spirit—unless someone caught her—and there the vision or trance occurred although sometimes, as at Atkinson, she would sit up to deliver the message.

Why then have we had this universal "sanitizing" of those key transcendent experiences when the resulting depictions are simply misrepresentations? Artists usually work on assignment—if they are working for pay—and follow directions of the buyers for the composition of any assigned work. So this sort of distorted representation was clearly what SDA institutions wanted produced even though it is patently false. Obviously, if Harry Anderson and his numerous artistic colleagues had displeased Adventist buyers, their work would simply have been rejected. The results then of this

nefarious collusion was simply pure duplicity, an arrogant and deliberate distortion of the truth for a people who clamed to have all Truth. What sheer mockery!

Apparently there is but a single artistic representation of Ellen in vision (or, actually, just emerging from one) that is historically accurate. As the cover for the April 1988 issue of *Adventist Currents*, which labeled itself "AN UNAUTHORIZED, FREE PRESS SUPPLEMENT TO OFFICIAL SEVENTH-DAY ADENTIST ULICATIONS," it unfortunately had limited circulation and limited impact. The artist, Donald Muth, depicts a very severe Ellen rising up slightly from the floor and pointing an accusatory finger at someone in the audience around her about whom she has obviously just been enlightened supernaturally. A prematurely balding, impressively bearded, and sternly scowling James is kneeling beside her holding a pillow for her head. They are surrounded by a motley crowd of both men and women promiscuously mixed and transported by various forms of religious and sexual ecstasy with several others also flat out on what must have been a very cold floor. The "holy kiss," "holy crawling," and charismatic raising of outstretched hands are all graphically depicted. Seven are helpfully identified in an identification aid sketch—Ellen and James conspicuous in the foreground; Dorinda Baker on her feet at the time and busily "holy kissing" a man identified only with "??" (which seems entirely reasonable since she was quite eclectic with her kissing evangelism); Israel Dammon is crawling and kissing with his partner Mrs. George S. Woodbury; Joel Doore is on his knees at Ellen's feet in abject prayer and supplication; and William C. Crosby stands aloof with folded hands and severely condemnatory (a thirty-seven-year-old attorney who was one of the principal witnesses for the prosecution).

Why this elaborate deception? For what studied purpose? Why have our leaders consistently treated the laity as if they were mindless, irresponsible children who must be told what they should think, read, and even see? Probably this was just one more facet in a carefully prepared program to improve Ellen's "image" for more receptive public consumption. It is one more evidence of the work of those avid "spin doctors" who play fast and loose with reality in their sadly warped minds to make Truth more attractive.

Parallel to this was the pervasive program to purge Ellen's writings and speeches of all remnants of Mainer colloquialisms and primitive diction. This misguided embarrassment largely destroyed a colorful "down-east" personality and rugged woman of the common people. (For one example of this sanitizing crusade see my article "Wrestling With Venerable Manuscripts," *Adventist Today*, May-June 2004, 10-13, 21.)

NIX MOVES FOR TOTAL DISCREDITING OF ALL CRITICS

There is a major section in Nix's long apologia beginning on page 8 that deserves careful consideration. He began with a seemingly fair minded and generous statement that he wanted "to give an alternative viewpoint about that evening's happenings . . . ." That, naturally, we freely grant; but with the implicit right of response.

What methodology does he propose to utilize in order to reveal truths not already apparent in the detailed testimony from a total of 38 sworn or affirmed eye-witnesses? Remember that all of that diverse testimony was given under the severe constraints of swearing or affirming to tell the whole truth or suffer the severe sanctions of contempt of court or perjury. Also much of that testimony was further rigorously confirmed under severe cross-examinations.

I now of my own free will, supported by my training and experience as a professional academic-type historian, formally declare in writing that in my carefully considered opinion this account of the Dammon Trial in the *Piscataquis Farmer* is a solid, carefully recorded and printed document of inestimable value in helping better understand my church's very early formative history. Its candor and details are simply astounding. Its cumulative picture is so persuasively disturbing in comparison with my prior understanding as a history and religion major in an Adventist college that I was simply stunned when I chanced upon it. I freely confess to having used every possible approach to judge it spurious in whole or in part. But I failed abjectly during years of keeping it quietly hidden away in a file cabinet.

This was no ordinary newspaper story, but a carefully prepared statement for an entire area of Maine that had become increasingly disturbed and thoroughly disgusted with the barbaric excesses of William Miller's followers in that region. Those concerned citizens also crowded the court house daily to carefully observe every detail of the legal proceedings.

The special "Reporter" was no run-of-the-mill cub reporter or amateur playing at journalism, but a humble, anonymous local citizen known and respected for his intelligence, honesty and integrity who was forced by public pressure into the unwanted role. He carefully checked his "copy" against individual and court records. When published and widely reprinted throughout Maine and New England it could be carefully studied by anyone for errors or misrepresentations.

It is extremely significant that I have never found a single published statement alleging any such problems, even among Millerite-Adventist believers. Their obvious

decision was to simply ignore it, or keep asserting that Ellen and James faced many such situations while on circuit "fighting fanaticism."

As for any carelessness in printing, I can find but two clear "typos" (neither creates any confusion and could have come from the difficult to read microfilm since I was not allowed to use a "hard copy" of this rare old newspaper, if one actually exists). Such levels of accuracy are indeed rare in old newspapers.

The fact that this account contains numerous disagreements is further proof of its reliability and authenticity. That reluctant "reporter" recorded what he heard and saw, not what he might have wanted to hear and see to make a better, more unified "story." He was not writing a script for a morality play nor an apologetic tract. To phrase this evaluation differently, the account's internal consistency is exemplary with no evident attempts to slant the report either for or against either side. It rings fair, true, and impartial. It nowhere reeks of the apologist's Machiavellian tactics.

After testing a document for any evidence of fraud, "special pleading," or linguistic manipulation, how does an academic historian handle it? His primary goal is to integrate it into the established body of factual material and reputable interpretations thus adding to our collective knowledge and understanding of a segment of our complex past. Any disagreements or contradictions have to be faced fairly, openly, and rationally if at all possible. If for any reason any assertions are beyond verification that too has to be freely admitted.

The historian also has to carefully evaluate the quality of all evidence used the same as in a court trial where testimony of certain types can be judged "inadmissible." For example "hearsay," evidence from non-eyewitnesses, and those with "vested

interests" are at the very least highly suspect. Although often particularly valuable, personal accounts—letters, diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, or journals—must be rigorously tested for accuracy and reliability, and firmly rejected if they fail to meet high standards. The fallibility of all human memory comes into play so the date when a particular personal account was written down is vital. This may sound too harsh, but a striking aphorism among historians bluntly states, "All personal accounts are just another form of fiction!" In this type of evidence the most sinister threat to the truth is not deliberate falsehoods or studied duplicity but the utilization of careful *selectivity* to make himself appear best in whatever guise he desires.

Once all the relevant documents have been thus tested, they then must be meticulously analyzed to determine what they are explicitly or implicitly saying about the chosen research topic. Of key importance here is the congruence, the major tendency, the trajectory of *all* sound evidence, not just a select few to force a thesis or hypothesis.

The assumption in all of this detail is that anyone calling himself a trained professional historian never starts to write until he has carefully researched all relevant resources and pursued all leads no matter how seemingly insignificant. Of course further research is done during the writing process when problems and questions and further leads appear. Somewhere in this daunting process the men are automatically separated from the boys. Or the aspiring historian decides that being an apologist would really be much more fun!

Perhaps more than enough of this pedantry so we turn to the apologist and his working procedures. Nix openly acknowledges being an apologist for Ellen White which is commendable. So in his work the apologetic methodology should be clearly evident as

well as its variations from the standard approach of historians. This calls for some specific examples.

When a competent apologist confronts evidence (documents) that are damaging to the institution or cause or person he defends, he must attack the credibility of those documents, or at least subtly undermine confidence in them. Thus Nix consistently labels this carefully prepared report on the Dammon Trial only a "newspaper" story, thereby conjuring up the carelessness and deadline pressure that this often implies. Or he labels that anonymous citizen who reported it just another "newspaper reporter," which, of course, he was definitely not.

"It is unfortunate that the full court transcript has not been found," is Nix's complaint. I fully agree—if, in fact, there ever was such a transcript made in the manner taken for granted today. However extant records at the Piscataquis County Records office show no disagreement with even minor details of the newspaper account.

Nix was also "intrigued and frustrated . . . [realizing] how much is really missing," citing the lack of comments by Dammon's retained lawyer. But Holmes was not on trial so he did not testify and the great variety of "testimony" about Dammon and his cohort was what the Reporter focused on.

If I read him correctly, Nix suggests that the basic motivation for Dammon's trial was primarily to avoid his becoming a charge on the community as an indigent and that the religious excesses were not primary—and, supposedly, were therefore distorted and dramatized to help secure a conviction and thus save town money.

My reading would be quite different. It seems to me that the broadly supported arrest and trial of a Millerite elder—although admittedly quite a minor one—allowed a

thoroughly disgusted community to vent their anger, annoyance, and weariness with the group's collective noise, vulgarity, blasphemy, sexual looseness, and distorted religious beliefs and practices. Thus most of the testimony was not directed against Dammon, the indicted prisoner, but against Dorinda Baker, Ellen Harmon, Simeon Hall, and James White. The collective adult community had no more tolerance for the likes of them and their so-called beliefs and practices than for Dammon. It is in this light that lawyer Holmes' plea for religious tolerance becomes so striking. Therefore Holmes deserves a place in the SDA pantheon as the first to strike a telling blow for religious liberty on behalf of our church. Or should he be memorialized on La Sierra University's beautiful Path of the Just?

Another tendency of Nix as a typical apologist is excessive use of the "suppositional" or "what if" mode of interpretation of evidence by positing hypothetical—or just plain imaginary—"facts" that have no documentary existence. Thus when Loton Lambert described "a woman on the floor" who had a vision to relate but failed to indicate its contents—Nix admitted he "could wish for a more complete account of that evening's meetings." From "the context it seems most likely" that this was Ellen, was Nix's quite reasonable conclusion, especially since several had testified that the meeting was held specifically to allow her to tell a vision she had received in Portland.

Then Nix took a major leap of faith, or presumption, as the evidence in *this document* provided him no support for this conclusion. "Although one would never guess it," he admitted, "from the abbreviated account we have to read, Ellen may well have taken quite some time telling her first vision received the previous December."

Admitting that this was "arguing from silence," using apologetic logic, it was essential for supporting two key points that followed. But I refuse to consider them because of the extremely weak base for their presentation. What was the actual vision Ellen repeatedly shared with that wild crowd that had strong support from this document?

It was simple, consistent, and always precisely the same completely new vision with not a solitary item from that first widely publicized Portland vision. According to several sworn witnesses it was repent and be baptized before midnight or be dispatched to Hell. No other message was related by Ellen that evening according to any of the 38 varied witnesses. Surely it was highly unlikely that the Court would have permitted any witness to deliver a two-hour speech on a topic entirely irrelevant to the subject of the trial. But if such a speech had been delivered it is unthinkable that the faithful Reporter would have entirely neglected mentioning it. But Nix doggedly pursued this conjecture since it was essential for his apologetic interpretation of this hostile document. So Ellen simply had to have done it!

ENDING OPTIMISTICALLY

Apologetics surely must be great fun to write since all those strict rules of historical evidence and interpretation are blithely tossed aside. So if I may utilize an apologetic mode I would propose a happy conclusion to this paper.

Here in this Dammon Trial document clearly evident for the faithful to see is the Hand of God in History—our own history as a church—if we will just relax our collective stiffened necks and study it carefully and prayerfully. This, of course, must confront a magnum assumption that the church actually wants to understand what this

document has to reveal and teach us. If even a miniscule "remnant" were willing to travel this rocky road what possible benefits might this provide?

This very significant and extremely complex historical document from our very inception as a church was designed to warn us against the fatal composite dangers of arrogance, hubris, hyperbole, selectivity, distortion (even duplicity?), mythologizing, and self-deception in relating and perpetuating our origins, especially the key roles of James and Ellen. But be warned. Once we accept this premise we will inevitably be overwhelmed with a blizzard of tough questions. For example, Why did we have to wait so long and endure so many brutal internal battles before this document was discovered? Why did not the participants themselves, our revered pioneers, disclose those details long before they were widely disseminated by the lowly *Piscataquis Farmer*? What were they so desperately anxious to hide?

Are we not now sufficiently mature to be able to handle such questions and problems as responsible adults? After all it is well over 200 years since our inception when Elder James White quietly said to Miss Ellen Harmon on the 15th of February 1845 in Atkinson, Maine—or a few days before after their first momentous encounter at Orrington-- "Ellen, we need to talk." And what a momentous talk they then had!

So as remarkably well educated adults, we can now face our past honestly and candidly, accepting the truth with humility and thankfulness, without grasping for myths or obfuscatory smoke screens. From those wild, anarchic, Pentecostal-type meetings emerged a world church of some 15 million members—and still growing. What a *remnant*! Oh *Little Flock*, how fearfully and wonderfully have you grown! That conception venue is a crucial segment of our vaunted Truth that we should accept and

find cause for praise and rejoicing instead of embarrassment and elaborate denial. What, in deed and in truth, hath God wrought!

POSTSCRIPT

Considerably more research has been done on various facets of this topic than could be covered in this paper. Therefore future revisions will have appendices and footnotes with added substantive materials. Specific examples are Dorinda Baker (a brief life sketch is now possible, with an appropriately tragic end); "Elder" Simeon Hall; Attorney James Stuart Holmes (surprisingly generous research finds should help do justice to this important but neglected Maine civic leader); women's and children's rights in Maine law; Elder James Springer White (who inexplicably was absolutely mute at Atkinson—at least according to any recorded testimony). Surprisingly several unexpected challenges have developed around James.

Inexplicably he deliberately ignored this critically important phase of his life in his 1868 autobiography, *Life Incidents*. Likewise a 2003 biography by Gerald Wheeler, *James White; Innovator and Overcomer*, only nods at the Dammon Trial in part of a footnote on page 44. There is no evidence that Wheeler ever read the trial record in *Spectrum.* How can this be excused in a serious biography? Gratuitously he blithely tosses in another variant spelling of the Prisoner's name without explanation—"Demmen."

Finally, and perhaps most important, a significant new scholarly work by Professor Ann Taves has been published by Princeton University Press (1999) with the provocative title, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James.* It must be carefully examined.